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Ethnic diversity in picture books through the eyes of librarians and parents

Lorelle Metusela

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Ethnic diversity in picture books through the eyes of librarians and parents

Abstract

This thesis examines the factors and priorities that are taken into account when parents and librarians select picture books for preschool aged children. In particular, it examines whether the ethnicity of characters and children are considered in the selection process. In doing so, it also considers how picture books are valued as part of the material culture of library and home spaces. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with parents and librarians, along with home and library tours during which photographs of picture book collections were taken. The results chapters demonstrate that parents and librarians valued quality picture books with good stories, pictures and format. Most parents and librarians agreed that ethnic diversity *should* be portrayed in picture books, however, they did not prioritise ethnic diversity when selecting picture books for children. Parents all placed high importance on reading picture books to their children. Their own values and nostalgic childhood memories are reflected in the picture book selection process and also in the manner in which picture books are displayed and stored as part of the material culture of family homes. Picture books play an important socialising role in the lives of young children, teaching them about themselves and the world. This thesis extends theories of everyday multiculturalism by positioning picture books as potential 'sites' for children's multicultural encounters. This argument is informed by evidence of children's pretend play. The thesis concludes that picture books and their characters, have a more-than-representational significance in young children's lives. This underscores the importance of ensuring realistic portrayals of ethnically diverse characters and communities in picture books.

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Ethnic Diversity in Picture Books Through the Eyes of Librarians and Parents

Lorelle Metusela

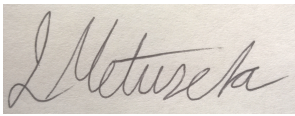
**School of Earth and Environmental Sciences
University of Wollongong**

A thesis is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the
Honours degree of Bachelor of Science, University of Wollongong

April 2014

Declaration

The information in this thesis is entirely the result of investigations conducted by the author, unless otherwise acknowledged and has not been submitted in part, or otherwise, for any other degree or qualification.

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, textured background. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'L Metusela'.

Lorelle Metusela

2 April 2014

Abstract

This thesis examines the factors and priorities that are taken into account when parents and librarians select picture books for preschool aged children. In particular, it examines whether the ethnicity of characters and children are considered in the selection process. In doing so, it also considers how picture books are valued as part of the material culture of library and home spaces. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with parents and librarians, along with home and library tours during which photographs of picture book collections were taken. The results chapters demonstrate that parents and librarians valued quality picture books with good stories, pictures and format. Most parents and librarians agreed that ethnic diversity *should* be portrayed in picture books, however, they did not prioritise ethnic diversity when selecting picture books for children. Parents all placed high importance on reading picture books to their children. Their own values and nostalgic childhood memories are reflected in the picture book selection process and also in the manner in which picture books are displayed and stored as part of the material culture of family homes. Picture books play an important socialising role in the lives of young children, teaching them about themselves and the world. This thesis extends theories of everyday multiculturalism by positioning picture books as potential ‘sites’ for children’s multicultural encounters. This argument is informed by evidence of children’s pretend play. The thesis concludes that picture books and their characters, have a more-than-representational significance in young children’s lives. This underscores the importance of ensuring realistic portrayals of ethnically diverse characters and communities in picture books.

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION	II
ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
LIST OF TABLES	IX
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	2
1.2 THE ROLE OF PICTURE BOOKS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON YOUNG CHILDREN.....	3
1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND THESIS OUTLINE.....	5
CHAPTER 2 A REVIEW OF EVERYDAY MULTICULTURALISM AND MATERIAL CULTURE.....	7
2.1 EVERYDAY MULTICULTURALISM.....	7
2.1.1 <i>Libraries as public spaces of everyday multiculturalism</i>	9
2.1.2 <i>Picture books as sites of multicultural encounters</i>	11
2.2 MATERIAL CULTURES	12
2.3 CONCLUSION.....	15
CHAPTER 3 METHODS	16
3.1 ETHICAL RESEARCH	16
3.2 REFLEXIVITY AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY	17
3.3 PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT	19
3.4 QUALITATIVE METHODS AND FRAMEWORK	21
3.4.1 <i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	22
3.4.2 <i>Library visits and observation</i>	23
3.4.3 <i>Home visits and observation</i>	23
3.4.4 <i>Photography in library and home spaces</i>	24
3.4.5 <i>Data analysis and coding</i>	24
3.5 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS.....	24
CHAPTER 4 PICTURE BOOKS AS MATERIAL CULTURE IN LIBRARY AND HOME SPACES	26
4.1 PICTURE BOOKS IN LIBRARY SPACES	27
4.1.1 <i>Layout and objects in children's sections within the libraries</i>	27
4.1.2 <i>Picture books kept separately</i>	30
4.1.3 <i>Valuing books – image, contents and condition</i>	34
4.2 PICTURE BOOKS IN HOME SPACES.....	36
4.2.1 <i>Positioning of children's picture books in the home</i>	36
4.2.2 <i>Ordering the picture book collections</i>	39
4.2.3 <i>Losing value</i>	42
4.2.4 <i>Personal value to the parents</i>	44
4.3 CONCLUSION.....	45
CHAPTER 5 HOW LIBRARIANS SELECT PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN: WHAT'S ETHNICITY GOT TO DO WITH IT?.....	47
5.1 UNDERSTANDING LIBRARIANS' PICTURE BOOK SELECTION PROCESS.....	47

5.1.1 Library profiles.....	47
5.1.2 Librarians' priorities: what makes a good picture book?.....	48
5.1.3 Methods of acquiring books	50
5.1.4 Catering for local communities	51
5.1.5 Selecting picture books for library 'Storytime' sessions.....	53
5.2 MULTICULTURAL ENCOUNTERS WITH CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS.....	54
5.2.1 The importance of picture books	55
5.2.2 Who and what is portrayed in Australian children's picture books?.....	56
5.2.3 How do representations of ethnic diversity in picture books affect children?	61
5.3 CONCLUSION.....	63
CHAPTER 6 HOW PARENTS SELECT PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN:	
WHAT'S ETHNICITY GOT TO DO WITH IT?.....	65
6.1 PARENTS' PICTURE BOOK SECTION CRITERIA	65
6.2 DOES ETHNIC DIVERSITY SHAPE PARENTS' PICTURE BOOK SELECTION?	68
6.2.1 Ethnic diversity within Australian society.....	69
6.2.2 Diversity in the world	74
6.2.3 No preference for ethnic diversity in picture books	77
6.3 DO PICTURE BOOKS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYDAY MULTICULTURAL ENCOUNTERS?.....	79
6.3.1 Do Australian picture books portray a multicultural society?.....	79
6.3.2 Which ethnic groups are under-represented in Australian picture books?	81
6.3.3 Young children's encounters with picture book characters: who do they relate to?	82
6.3.4 Children's encounters with picture book characters: more-than-representations?.....	85
6.4 CONCLUSION.....	87
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION	90
7.1 KEY FINDINGS.....	90
7.2 FURTHER RESEARCH.....	92
REFERENCES	94
APPENDICES.....	100
APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORM.....	100
APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION	105
APPENDIX C: LEAFLET	106
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES	107

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Definitions of key terminology	1
Figure 3.1 Positionality statement.....	18
Figure 4.1: Large open space: Somerville’s children’s section	27
Figure 4.2: Decorations and toys at Thornbury	28
Figure 4.3: Different types of shelving at Hartland children’s section.....	29
Figure 4.4: Highly sought after PRC collection: Somerville.....	30
Figure 4.5: PRC books interfiled: Hartland (PRC stickers circled in red and bilingual books circled in purple).	31
Figure 4.6: First experience books: children’s information section, Somerville.....	32
Figure 4.7: Chinese language section, Hartland	33
Figure 4.8: Chinese language section, Somerville.....	33
Figure 4.9: CBCA (Hartland) and PRC (Thornbury) ‘eye-catching’ stickers	34
Figure 4.10: Marian’s picture book collections: girls’ room, parents’ room.....	36
Figure 4.11: Sarah’s picture book collections: son’s bedroom and loungeroom.....	37
Figure 4.12: Andrea’s picture book collections: daytime books and change table books.....	38
Figure 4.13: Vanessa’s picture book collection: daughter’s room	38
Figure 4.14: Charlotte’s picture book collection in the playroom	40
Figure 4.15: ‘Valued’ books shelved above ‘rubbish’ books	41
Figure 4.16: Shelf ‘out of reach’ and ‘depressing’ book	42
Figure 5.1: Where is the Green Sheep? (Mem Fox); We’re Going on a Bear Hunt (Michael Rosen)	54
Figure 5.2: <i>Possum Magic</i> (Mem Fox); <i>Wombat Stew</i> (Marcia Vaughan); <i>Koala Lou</i> (Mem Fox).....	57
Figure 5.3: <i>Peggy</i> (Anna Walker); <i>The Terrible Suitcase</i> (Emma Allen); <i>With Nan</i> (Tania Cox).....	57
Figure 5.4: <i>Ziba Came on a Boat</i> (Liz Lofthouse).....	58

Figure 5.5: Fang Fang's Chinese New Year (Sally Rippin)	59
Figure 5.6: <i>The Swirling Hijaab</i> (Na'ima Robert); <i>The Librarian of Basra</i> (Jeanette Winter); <i>Peeking ducks</i> (Krista Bell).....	60
Figure 6.1: <i>My name is not Isabella</i> (Jennifer Fosberry).....	67
Figure 6.2: Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes (Mem Fox)	71
Figure 6.3: There's a Train Going by My Window (Wendy Kesselan)	75
Figure 6.4: <i>Around the World Piggy Wiggy</i> (Diane Fox); <i>Martine</i> (Gilbert Delahaye)	77
Figure 6.5: <i>Starting School</i> (Janet and Allan Ahlberg).....	83
Figure 6.6: Lotta and Lola	86
Figure 6.7: Martine with her family and friends.....	86

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Participant profiles – librarians.....	20
Table 3.2 Participant profiles – parents	21
Table 3.3 Project aims and relevant interview questions.....	23
Table 6.1 Ethnicity discussed before or after prompting	69

Chapter 1 Introduction

Picture books are an important medium for socialising children (Dellmann-Jenkins *et al.*, 2009; Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010; Crisp and Hiller, 2011). It is one way that children can learn about the world around them, therefore, it is important that children have access to realistic portrayals of the society in which they live. Research on ethnic diversity in children's books is scarce, particularly in Australia. A small number of content analyses have revealed that ethnic diversity is under-represented and misrepresented in picture books (Cole and Valentine, 2000; Morgan, 2011; Metusela, 2013). This thesis investigates how adults select picture books for preschool aged children and whether they take ethnic diversity into account in the selection process. This project is significant because it responds to a gap in human geography by extending theoretical frameworks to investigate picture books as material culture and as opportunities for everyday multicultural encounters.

First, this chapter provides a brief background to Australian picture books, including findings from a content analysis I conducted on Australian award-winning picture books in 2013 (Metusela, 2013). Next, it examines the significance of picture books for children's cognitive development and the importance of socialising children with realistic portrayals of ethnic diversity. Finally, the chapter presents the research aims and an outline of the subsequent chapters. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the key terminology adopted throughout this thesis.

Anglo-Australian is used to refer to Australians of British ancestry. This group is also referred to as the **ethnic majority** throughout this thesis.

Non-Anglo-Australian is used to refer to **ethnic minority** persons, including Indigenous Australians and Australians from migrant backgrounds outside the United Kingdom.

Ethnic/ethnicity is used in preference to the term 'race', which is more commonly used in US-based research on children's picture books.

Ethnic diversity is used to refer to a variety of ethnic groups and cultures living side-by-side in society. Thus, ethnically diverse picture books are those in which a diverse range of ethnic majority and ethnic minority characters are incorporated.

Inter-ethnic relationship is used to refer to a married/co-habiting couple in which the two partners have different ethnic backgrounds.

Multi-ethnic person refers to a person whose parents have different ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 1.1 Definitions of key terminology

1.1 Background

There is a noticeable gap in research on ethnicity in Australian children's picture books. Renowned Australian children's author, Mem Fox (2003), has expressed concern that non-Anglo-Australian characters are not represented and that picture books indoctrinate Australian children into a white, male-dominated culture. Fox (2003) has likened the history of Australian picture books to the situation in the United States, where picture books historically omitted non-white characters. When they were included, they were portrayed according to racist stereotypes. Since the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, overt racism and stereotyping of ethnic minority groups in North American picture books has declined (Morgan, 2011). However, misrepresentation of ethnic minorities remains a problem.

Many contemporary picture books that include non-white characters are written and illustrated by ethnic majority (white) authors and illustrators. Mendoza and Reese (2001) stated that picture books written on behalf of a marginalised culture by authors who are part of the dominant culture provide a biased account. Inaccurate and colourblind portrayals have been critiqued. 'Colourblind' refers to the tendency to portray ethnic minority characters as being identical in all respects to white characters, with the exception of their physical appearance. Such approaches fail to engage with cultural differences in a realistic or meaningful way (Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Walton *et al.*, 2013). According to Fesperman (2013:28) colourblind approaches have led to the 'erasure of cultural differences in curricula' and the misleading 'assumption that we are all the same'. This has resulted in 'cultural silencing' and white privilege has been made to appear as a 'logical consequence of the natural order of things' (Freeman, 2005:1). Morgan (2011:358) called for 'culturally authentic' books, which she defined as books that acknowledge cultural differences without stereotyping and which lead 'readers to develop an accurate understanding of a given group of people.' Picture books with realistic representations of a diverse society can be an effective tool for teaching children multiple perspectives and for gaining insights into ethnic diversity.

In 2013, I conducted a Directed Studies project as part of my undergraduate degree investigating portrayals of ethnicity in Australian award-winning picture books

(Metusela, 2013). The project sought to determine whether Australian authors and illustrators portrayed an ethnically diverse society. It was the first of its kind in Australia. The project involved a content analysis of the winners, short lists and notable lists of the Children's Book Council of Australia's (CBCA) book of the year awards from 2001-2012. The sample included 135 picture books with human characters that targeted children at a pre-reading or early reading stage (2-5 years old).

The results showed that a sizeable number of non-Anglo-Australian characters were portrayed, although multi-ethnic characters were scarce and ethnic minority characters were rarely given central roles (Metusela, 2013). These findings paralleled Chaudhri and Teale (2013) and Cole and Valentine's (2000) conclusions about multi-ethnic characters in North American children's literature. In Metusela (2013), most of the books that did portray non-Anglo-Australian main characters were set in the Australian outback or overseas. Indigenous Australians were always depicted in remote settings in small Aboriginal communities. Similar observations were made by Mackinlay and Barney (2008) who investigated the Australian children's television program *Playschool* and found that Indigenous Australians were never portrayed in contemporary urban settings. These misleading portrayals can lead to false impressions that Indigenous Australians only belong in remote settings, despite the fact that Sydney is home to the largest Indigenous population in Australia (ABS, 2012). The immense migrant ethnic diversity of urban Australia was also drastically under-represented in the books reviewed by Metusela (2013). The following section explains why such absences and mis-representations are significant for children's cognitive development and socialisation.

1.2 The role of picture books and their impacts on young children

Literature in early childhood education and development psychology underscores the importance of picture books for children's cognitive development – including why realistic portrayals of ethnic diversity are crucial. This literature provides a platform to introduce frameworks of everyday multiculturalism and material cultures that underpin this research, which are useful tools for human geographers and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Picture books play an important role in the cognitive development of young children (Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010). They are a means for children to learn about themselves and others. A systematic review of education and behavioural science literature by Cole and Valentine (2000) showed that young children begin to develop their social awareness and a sense of self from as young as two years old. From the age of three, children begin to differentiate between skin tone, facial structures and hair types and can develop attitudes towards these physical differences (Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010; Raabe and Beelmann, 2011). A number of scholars (Holland, 2005; Dellmann-Jenkins *et al.*, 2009; Crisp and Hiller, 2011) have also found that children aged four to five years begin to construct their cultural identity in relation to their families and that the ages of two to seven years are crucial in shaping children's identities and understandings of society (including the existence of prejudice). Such evidence draws attention to the role that picture books can play in broadening children's perspectives and in supporting the self-esteem of ethnic minority children (Morgan, 2009).

A number of US-based researchers within the field of child development have expressed concern with the effects of under-representation and mis-representation of ethnic minority characters and perspectives in picture books. The effects include white children experiencing self-importance or white privilege and ethnic minority children feeling that they do not belong (Larrick, 1965; Cole and Valentine, 2000; Fox, 2003; Chaudhri and Teale, 2013). As Cole and Valentine (2000:307) stated, all children want to belong 'and find their place in the larger whole'. Fox (2003) highlighted the disappointment experienced when a child learning to read wonders 'where am I?' in picture books and questions what is a 'normal' family. Fox (2003: 656) argued that picture books are not only political, reflecting the values of society, but that they are also active:

They mould us into who we think we are, like plasticine being shaped this way and that... [They affect] the equilibrium of children who do not belong to so-called normal families. It tells them they are odd and different.

Changes in the ethnic composition of western societies have made it increasingly important for picture books to teach children how to interact effectively with people of different ethnic backgrounds. Picture books can teach a child to identify with characters, see their perspectives and, through that connection, to consider their own

thoughts and actions (Mendoza and Reese, 2001). Picture books that respectfully and accurately display a variety of ethnic groups living side-by-side in society – ethnic diversity – can help children develop the necessary social competence to demonstrate respect and understanding of diverse ethnicities (Mendoza and Reese, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2006). Picture books can play an important role in enhancing the development of self-esteem and positive self-identity amongst ethnic minority children, while teaching ethnic majority children multiple perspectives and creating a healthy acceptance of diversity (Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010). Alternatively, they can support stereotyping and social exclusion (Fox 2003; Morgan 2009). It is crucial then, for picture books to portray realistic representations of ethnic diversity.

This study explores whether Australian adults responsible for selecting picture books for children are aware of these issues and whether they take ethnic diversity into account when selecting picture books. In doing so, this thesis makes a contribution to existing literature on ethnic socialisation, which has thus far focused on the impact of adults' explicit messages relating to ethnicity, rather than implicit ones, such as those in books (Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010; Priest *et al.*, 2013).

1.3 Research aims and thesis outline

This research project was framed around four research aims:

1. To better understand how adults (parents/guardians and librarians) select picture books for preschool aged children.
2. To investigate if/how adults take ethnic diversity (of characters and children) into account when selecting picture books for children.
3. To explore how picture books are displayed, arranged and engaged with as part of the material culture of home and library spaces; and what this reveals about the valuing of (different types) of picture books in these settings.
4. To examine the more-than-representational significance of picture books in young children's lives and their role in providing opportunities for everyday multicultural encounters.

The remainder of this thesis is structured around these aims. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework for the thesis. It reviews literature surrounding everyday

multiculturalism and material culture in the context of picture books and library and home spaces. This chapter also identifies a research gap in terms of ethnicity and children's picture books and explains how this thesis responds to this gap. The research methods used to undertake this project are explained in Chapter 3. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the research findings. Chapter 4 analyses the significance of books as material objects in library and home spaces. Chapter 5 outlines the picture book selection criteria operationalised by librarians. In addition, it discusses both library spaces and picture books themselves as potential sites for multicultural encounters. Chapter 6 explores parents' picture book selection criteria and describes the more-than-representational significance of picture books in the lives of young children. Chapter 7 addresses the significance of the research findings and limitations of the present study. It also reflects on opportunities for further research.

Chapter 2 A review of everyday multiculturalism and material culture

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the underlying theoretical frameworks adopted in this study. Chapter 1 provided an overview of existing research investigating the importance of ethnicity in children's picture books. Such research has predominantly been informed by theories of early childhood education and by cognitive and psychological perspectives. This chapter explores the potential for two theoretical approaches adopted in contemporary human geography – everyday multiculturalism and material culture – to enrich understandings of the significance of children's picture books. By bringing together theories of everyday multiculturalism and material culture, this thesis proposes that greater attention be paid to books (in this case, children's picture books) as objects with more-than-representational significance. First, this chapter explores the significance of theories of everyday multiculturalism for understanding the role of diverse public spaces, such as libraries. Second, it considers the potential for theories of everyday multiculturalism to be applied to the 'spaces' of children's picture books based on understandings of children's pretend play. Finally, the chapter explains how theories of material culture highlight the significance and value of children's picture books in everyday lives.

2.1 Everyday Multiculturalism

Everyday multiculturalism considers how ethnic diversity is experienced through everyday encounters in ordinary spaces and in normal situations in daily life (Wise and Velayutham, 2009; O'Connor, 2010). It positions aspects of daily life that have often been overlooked by academics (as trivial and mundane), as crucial pathways for exploring relationships in ethnically diverse settings. Everyday multiculturalism, as a theoretical perspective, emerged through a critique of the ideas of multiculturalism dominant in policy-making (O'Connor, 2010). Multiculturalism was something discussed by the middle-class, yet on the street level it was lived by the working-class (Amin, 2002) - in schools, streets, shops, parks, beaches, sports clubs and on public transport (Butcher and Harris, 2010); and through everyday activities such as

shopping (Watson, 2009; Radice, 2009), eating (Khoo, 2009; Duruz, 2009), leisure (Cadzow, 2009) and commuting (Wilson, 2011). Multicultural policy, however, was imposed as a means of managing diversity – from the top down – and thus often overlooked the everyday lived experiences of people in diverse spaces (Wise and Velayutham, 2009). Research under the banner of everyday multiculturalism has sought to represent multiculturalism from the ‘frontlines’, by dealing with the mundane aspects of multicultural life (O’Connor, 2010:526).

O’Connor (2010), for instance, used everyday multiculturalism as a framework in his study of young Muslims in Hong Kong. He argued that everyday multiculturalism foregrounds how multiculturalism is context-dependent and is shaped through the history and culture of those who contribute to it. In other words, multiculturalism is not universal as the everyday occurrences and lived experiences of culture are unique. Ho (2011) investigated schools as spaces of everyday multiculturalism, concluding that schools are highly significant for young people in the formation of their identities and the shaping of their worldviews and capacities. Harris (2009) argued that everyday multiculturalism is an appropriate approach when investigating how young people negotiated cultural difference at a local level. For Harris (2009:188) ‘[m]ulticulturalism is a dynamic, lived field of action within which social actors both construct and deconstruct ideas of cultural difference, national belonging and place-making’. This takes multiculturalism beyond an ideology to a ‘lived practice of culture’, where young people are social actors creating social practices (Harris, 2009). Human geographer, Wilson (2011) examined ‘bus passengering’ as enabling everyday multicultural encounters. Her findings concurred with Carr *et al.*, (1993), that temporary bonds can be created between strangers placed in similar settings. Likewise, Valentine (2008: 323) has also reflected on ‘geographies of encounters’, by examining ‘the role of shared space in providing the opportunity for encounters between strangers’.

It is within the mundane experiences of everyday life in multicultural spaces that questions of citizenship, national identity, belonging and community arise and are negotiated (Butcher and Harris, 2010). Geographer, Amin (2002) has argued that everyday negotiations of cultural difference are at the centre of identity and attitude formation and have the potential to strengthen confidence in one’s ethnic self. Thus,

the everyday negotiations that are common in spaces of association, such as libraries, have the potential to increase intercultural understanding (Wise and Velayutham, 2009; Aabø and Audunson, 2012).

2.1.1 Libraries as public spaces of everyday multiculturalism

Urban public space is a place for proximity, diversity and accessibility – a place where the mingling of strangers of all different social backgrounds occurs (Goheen, 1998). Public spaces can thus play the role of creating a sense of community and can confront segregation and the anxiety associated with it (Miles, 2012). Public spaces are settings within which social networks are formed. They can provide opportunities for interaction between different ethnic groups, thus building social capital (Priest *et al.*, 2014). Recent research demonstrates that frequent and positive contact between people of different backgrounds can reduce prejudice while promoting positive intergroup relations (Priest *et al.*, 2014). Public libraries are an example of such spaces that have the potential to promote social capital and encounters of multiculturalism.

Libraries play an important role in communities (Johnson, 2010). They provide a safe space for children, a space for seeking information, public access to the internet and a space for educational or leisure reading. As public spaces libraries are ‘institutions with the potential to build community and citizenship’ (Aabø *et al.*, 2010:16). Aabø and Audunson (2012) studied the uses of library spaces in Norway. They found that libraries function as ‘community squares’ and as places where people are exposed to ethnic diversity. While most library users were strangers to one another, frequent socialising amongst the strangers was observed (Aabø and Audunson, 2012). These interactions constitute the library as a space in which people are exposed to diversity and otherness (Leckie and Hopkins, 2002; Aabø and Audunson, 2012) and in which diverse people are treated and respected as equals with the same user rights (Vårheim, 2007).

Worpole (2013) described libraries as the ‘living room in the city’, a place of comfort and familiarity. Aabø and Audunson (2012) and McKechnie *et al.*, (2004) claimed that library users feel a sense of ownership and security. They let their children play

while they meet with other parents in a way that would not occur in other public spaces. McKechnie *et al.* (2004) compared public libraries and bookstores. Their findings demonstrated the social aspect of libraries, in particular amongst young mothers and children. Strangers are often observed talking over books or helping each other (McKechnie *et al.*, 2004).

Researchers have paid particular attention to the importance of libraries as meeting places and information portals for migrants. Libraries provide opportunities to keep in contact with migrants' cultures of origin through books, newspapers and films in community languages. However, they also play an important role in helping migrants develop a sense of place and to settle amidst their new environment, including by functioning as a meeting place that facilitates communication with the ethnic majority (Williamson and Roberts, 2010; Audunson *et al.*, 2011; Dali, 2012). An ethnographic study by Aabø *et al.* (2010) found that migrant women in Norway became acquainted with strangers in the library - both those from their own culture and those from the majority culture. This fostered a sense of inclusion in Norwegian society and enabled bonds to be formed with other women (Aabø *et al.*, 2010). Thus, libraries have been positioned as important sites for the formation of social capital in multicultural communities (see for example, Johnson (2010) in the North American context and Hillenbrand (2005) in the South Australian context). In a similar Swedish study, Svensk Biblioteksörening (2008) found that the librarian was often the first ethnic majority contact with whom migrants establish a relationship.

Libraries as meeting places open up new worlds through library-organised activities and through the ethnically diverse range of visitors. Crucially, they provide such opportunities in a safe environment and in subtle (rather than confronting) ways (Aabø *et al.*, 2010; Aabø and Audunson, 2012). According to Amin (2002), placing people from diverse backgrounds in a new setting, where they interact with strangers in a common activity, can undo the thinking that strangers are enemies. Following this logic, Vårheim (2011) described libraries as providing a step towards positive everyday social interactions between different ethnic groups. Despite the proliferation of studies describing the important 'multicultural work' that goes on in library spaces, an analysis of the role of books within these processes has been conspicuously absent. Indeed, although Aabø and Audunson (2012) identified the role of the library

provided technologies (computers and internet access) as ‘virtual meeting places’, the books housed within libraries were sidelined in their analysis. The following sections describe how this thesis expands upon existing understandings of the role of libraries, by positioning books as potential sites for everyday multicultural encounters.

2.1.2 Picture books as sites of multicultural encounters

This thesis aims to explore the potential for libraries to do more than provide locations for multicultural encounters between people. It seeks to address a gap in the literature by positioning picture books as a way of *experiencing* ethnic diversity within library spaces and also home spaces. This thesis thus extends the concept of everyday multiculturalism to include children’s encounters of ethnic diversity *through* picture books and through pretend play *with* picture book characters. This section builds on the child development literature that was reviewed in Chapter 1. It uses evidence around children’s pretend play to develop a rationale for this extended conceptualisation of everyday multiculturalism.

From a young age, children begin to pretend play. This can be in the form of dramatic role play where a child takes on a role, develops a scenario or transforms objects to suit their needs, for example, imaginary friends and in/animate objects (Fein, 1975; The Child Development Institute, 2013; Russ and Wallace, 2013). These actions involve social dialogue, improvisation, role taking and cognitive strategies such as joint planning, negotiation, problem solving and goal seeking. Somewhere between the ages of one and two years, a young child develops the ability to play the role of another person, such as a mother (Fein, 1975; Bergen, 2002). By around two years of age, the child becomes independent of immediate stimulation and is able to pretend one object is another and to give life to inanimate objects (Fein, 1975). At the age of three, the child can mime and no longer requires objects as a basis for pretending (Miller S, 2010). At this age, a child can also create imaginary friends, although their pretend play is mostly based on their own experiences and environment, such as play acting family mealtime and other domestic scenarios (Miller S, 2010; The Child Development Institute, 2013). However, by age four, children expand upon these themes but develop a firm grasp on what is reality and what is fantasy.

Pretend play is very important for young children and is to be encouraged in their daily lives. It involves many areas of the brain, including emotion, language, cognition and sensorimotor actions (Bergen, 2002). Through pretend play, children can explore other possibilities, learn about other children's experiences, learn to resolve conflict with other children and also reflect on and extend their experiences (The Child Development Institute, 2013). In addition, pretend play helps children learn human roles such as caring and nurturing, as well as leadership (Miller S, 2000; 2010). To adults, pretend play might be trivial, but to children it is their work, a tool where they can learn about themselves, others and the world around them (Rogers, 2001). Quality role play is essential in the development of children until the age of five, as it provides a space for self-regulation and helps develop problem solving skills and social cognition and as well as in academic areas such as literacy, mathematics and science (Bergen, 2002).

Children gather ideas from books and television and then *transform* the characters and scenarios to suit their interests and understandings (Bergen, 2002; Bane, 2008; Miller S, 2010). Children's picture books thus provide an important prompt for children's role-playing activities. Through pretend play, characters and scenarios in children's books are more-than-representations; they become a part of children's lives as they socially interact with them on a daily basis. When considered alongside the theories of everyday multiculturalism described earlier in this chapter, these understandings of children's cognitive development point towards picture books as potential sites of everyday multicultural encounters. As is explored through parents' accounts of their children's pretend play in Chapter 6, children do much more than look at the characters portrayed in their picture books. They play *with* them and in some instances, *become* them. This underscores the importance of ensuring that picture books (within libraries and homes) contain realistic and accurate portrayals of ethnic diversity.

2.2 Material cultures

The literature described throughout this chapter has positioned libraries as important public spaces within which everyday multicultural encounters occur. However, with the exception of two studies which described how migrants use libraries to access

books published in their ‘mother tongues’ (Dali, 2012; Audunson *et al.*, 2011), this literature has scarcely considered the *material* contents of library spaces. Books – the key component of the material culture of libraries – have been largely absent from discussions of the potential for libraries to promote contact between diverse ethnic groups.

Material culture is the study of how people’s values are informed by the things they surround themselves with. These values are formed through their background, circumstances, relationships and everyday lives (Miller, 2008a). Relationships between human identity and objects have long been understood to be important by archaeologists, who rely on objects to reconstruct people and society from material remains (Miller, 2008b). These artefacts are intrinsic property and proof of social existence (Hides, 1997). Studies of material culture explore the significance of ordinary objects in the lives of people. Miller (2008b:277) described objects as important as they:

...act as the frame of interaction and behaviour...which help determine, often unconsciously, our categorization and appraisal of our circumstances.

While objects may appear inconsequential and may fade out of our focus (as is apparent in the omission of books within the literature on libraries discussed in this chapter), they play an important role in determining our behaviour and identity. Miller (2008a) argued that people create relationships with things and with people and that these material and social routines give meaning to their lives. To Miller D (2010b; 2008a), objects are signs and symbols that define us. He argued that through objects (possessions) people express themselves. Therefore, in this project, picture books and picture book collections, are positioned as *objects* that both reflect and shape the identities and values of the study participants.

Perspectives gained from material culture studies have informed the work of contemporary human geographers. Tolia-Kelly (2004), for instance, sought to understand the importance of landscapes to South Asian migrants living in London through visual cultures – such as photographs displayed in their homes. She argued that photographs have value beyond their textual content; they are ‘fragments of biographies’ connecting people to specific places in a specific moment of time (Tolia-

Kelly, 2004:680). Tolia-Kelly's (2004) research demonstrated that objects (such as photographs), located in the domestic sphere, form a sense of identity and evoke a sense of belonging to migrants in their new environment. Similarly, Rose (2000; 2003) has written on the value of material and visual cultures in the domestic sphere through case studies of photography - the uses and effects of common, everyday objects. Both Rose and Tolia-Kelly positioned everyday objects in the domestic sphere as the product of relationships that extend beyond the home. Bennett (2001: 89) in examining the 'materiality of matter' was interested in 'speculating' about how objects are 'arranged' or how they are 'liable to arrangement'. This is of relevance in my thesis as I examine how picture books are positioned, ordered and valued in library and home spaces.

To my knowledge, studies of material culture in all disciplines have paid scant attention to books in general and picture books in particular. I have come across only one study linking theories of material culture to picture books (Crabb and Bielawski, 1994). However, that study did not investigate picture books as material culture *per se*, rather, it investigated the portrayal of gendered material culture *within* picture books. Psychologists Crabb and Bielwaski (1994) explained that picture books show 'model social representations' of material culture through the illustrations of characters and their possessions. They found that picture book illustrations have not shifted over the years and that they still present artefacts by gender-based division of labour. For example, artefacts connected to domestic labour were primarily used by females, while artefacts connected to non-domestic labour were used by males. Further, they acknowledged the role of picture books in socialising children into the world of human-made artefacts.

As explored in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis, picture book collections (in library and home spaces) are significant as they subtly define and give identity to their collectors. The manner in which picture books are arranged or displayed, whether in a library or in a home, is also of significance as the spatial preference given to them can demonstrate the value placed on different items within the collection (Bennett, 2001; Rose, 2000; 2003; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). In discussions with the research participants and in the results presented in this thesis, picture books are positioned as material culture - as objects that *matter* and that are of value in everyday lives.

2.3 Conclusion

Public libraries are spaces in which everyday negotiations occur through social interactions with other library users of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds. This chapter used theories of everyday multiculturalism to interpret the important role of libraries as diverse public spaces. However, while the literature frequently identified libraries as *spaces* within which multicultural encounters occur between people, the potential for library books to do important multicultural work was overlooked. This thesis extends theories of everyday multiculturalism to include picture books as sites for potential multicultural encounters. The significance of picture books is more-than-representational, as they open worlds of ethnic diversity through pretend play in the daily lives of children. This highlights the need for children to be exposed to realistic and accurate portrayals of ethnic diversity in picture books. Additionally, this chapter has drawn attention to the potential for perspectives informed by material culture studies to foreground the significance of picture books in home and library spaces. Using this framework, the remainder of this thesis positions picture book collections as important components of the *material culture* of domestic and library spaces. Picture books are significant objects of value in everyday lives and play an important role in constituting identities. The following chapter outlines the methods that are used in this research.

Chapter 3 Methods

This chapter explains the methods utilised in this project. The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with librarians and parents of young children. Interviews took place in libraries and participants' homes in order to enable the researcher to observe the positioning of children's picture books in these spaces. With consent, photographs were taken in order to document the placement of picture book collections and to maintain a visual record of key picture books mentioned during interviews. First, this chapter describes the research ethics process and discusses reflexivity and researcher positionality in qualitative research. The chapter then outlines participant recruitment, the methods of data collection and the type of data analysis used. Finally, it outlines some of the limitations to the research methods.

3.1 Ethical research

Ethical research involves making decisions over what is morally right and wrong in regards to the researcher's responsibilities to research participants (Cloke *et al.*, 2000; Dowling, 2010). Key issues for this project were participant confidentiality, informed consent and restrictions on contact with young children and Indigenous groups. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and when describing participating libraries, to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent involves informing participants of the requirements of a project before they give their consent to participate. It also involves maintaining the participants' trust (Israel and Hay, 2006). In ethical research, keeping information from participants is considered deception (Dowling, 2010). All participants in this project understood that their participation was voluntary. They received a participant information sheet prior to consenting to interviews, which clearly stated the aims and purpose of the research, what was required of the participants, as well as their rights (Appendix A). However, this research did involve an element of deception. The study's focus on ethnicity was omitted from the participant information sheet (approved by the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee HE13/144). This was in order to determine the priority participants placed on ethnicity when selecting picture books and whether they mentioned ethnicity before being prompted.

Children's perspectives would have provided additional insight into the role of picture books in their lives. It would also have been useful to observe children at pretend play based upon book characters and scenarios. However, a decision was made to limit participation in this study to adults (parents and librarians) as research with young children requires a longer ethics approval process and this may have inhibited the timely completion of the research. In addition, the research would have benefited from the perspectives of Indigenous participants recruited through Indigenous community centres or organisations. However, the ethics approval process to work with Indigenous communities is very complex and time would not allow it. The project was open to Indigenous participants recruited through other means, but no Indigenous participants volunteered to participate.

3.2 Reflexivity and researcher positionality

This study has origins in a Directed Studies project undertaken earlier in my undergraduate studies (see Chapter 1), which revealed that the immense ethnic diversity of urban Australia was drastically under-represented in Australian picture books. At the completion of that project, many questions were left unanswered. For example, I wanted to know whether the portrayal of ethnic diversity within picture books was important to adults who provide picture books to children (parents and librarians) and what they had observed about representations of ethnic diversity in Australian picture books. In addition, I wondered whether perspectives would differ according to the ethnic background of parents and their child/ren. This honours project offered an opportunity to address these questions.

In qualitative research, the writing is not neutral and detached, rather the voices of the researcher and participants are present. Therefore, it is important to avoid appropriating the participants' voices – hence, reflexivity is vital. Reflexivity is 'self-critical, sympathetic introspection and the self conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher...' (England, 2010:82). In order to maintain rigour, it is essential to reflect on the researcher's positionality and how it, combined with 'time, place and historical condition', influences the research results (Bender, 1993:2). As such, it is

highly important for a researcher to understand their own biography, particularly when interpreting and analysing the data (Mansvelt and Berg, 2010).

I found this project personally interesting because of my own background. I was born in Fiji to a white mother who had grown up in Fiji and a Polynesian father who grew up on an outer island and belonged to a minority ethnic group in Fiji. When I was a baby we moved to Wollongong. My family was very open to different cultures: it was multi-ethnic, we were living in an adopted country and we regularly housed international students (homestays) from all over the world.

As a child I went to a private K-12 school where there were very few non-Anglo-Australian families. I was surrounded by white children and did not think much about my cultural identity. My classmates and their parents (other than close friends) assumed I was 'fully white', as I have fair enough skin to 'pass' as Anglo-Australian. My awareness of my cultural identity began when I was seven years old when my family travelled to the island where my father was born. I discovered a whole new dimension to my family and realised that I had missed out on important learning experiences that even infants living on the island knew, such as cultural dance, speaking the language and having extended family members as an integral part of everyday life. During my teenage years, I noticed differences between my family and others, such as minor language differences, emphasis on (extended) family and feasts. At times I wasn't quite sure where I belonged. For the first time I began to question certain things: was my family perceived as 'Australian' by others? Should I identify with my Australian friends or my cultural family? It took several trips home (to Fiji) over the years, as well as travelling around the world as an Aussie (with other Australians), to form some sort of balance between the two cultures. I have now joined a Pacific Island students group at university. I find I get along these students easily, despite age and academic differences, as we all have something in common to build relationships on and to relate to.

When I was young there were only white picture books, I didn't think about it much then. Looking back on my childhood, I think I would have been able to discover my cultural identity and sense of belonging a lot earlier if I had more exposure to things that taught me about my culture, as well as how to situate these cultural practices within an Australian context. I began to learn more about my cultural background from the age of seven, although there is only so much you can participate in and experience in a city where there were no others from your ethnic background. Picture books depicting multiculturalism and multi-ethnic families could have been a really helpful tool! I can understand and relate to the potential frustration of ethnic minority or multi-ethnic children who cannot find themselves in picture books. Therefore, I see it as highly important for Australian picture books to realistically portray ethnic diversity.

Figure 3.1 Positionality statement

From a young age, I was exposed to many different cultures, including that of my own multi-ethnic background. This largely shaped my positionality and is the main reason why I am so interested in ethnic diversity (see Figure 3.1). I grew up with picture books with all Anglo-Australian characters. Even now, the thought of a picture book written in my ethnic language or including my people/culture excites me. Hence, if I were a parent I would endeavour to show my child/ren picture books with characters which reflect their ethnic background, ideally with cultural elements mixed in, as well as books portraying the diversity of Australian society. I endeavoured not to push these thoughts onto participants during the interviews, or to read into their answers during the interpretation process. The interview schedule was carefully designed in order to avoid assuming that representations of ethnicity in children's picture books would be similarly important to the research participants (see 2.1).

3.3 Participant selection and recruitment

Ethics approval for the study was granted on 31st October 2013. The libraries were contacted from 14th November 2013 and interviews were conducted between 21st November 2013 and 31st January 2014. This project's overarching aim was to examine how adults select picture books for children. For preschool-aged children, parents and libraries are main sources of picture books in their everyday lives. Thus, parents and librarians were targeted as participants.

Several recruitment methods were used. First, purposeful sampling was used in five suburbs of Sydney and Wollongong with varying levels of ethnic diversity (ascertained using ABS data on place of birth, ancestry and languages spoken at home). The initial five suburbs included: one with a predominantly Anglo-Australian population; two characterised as moderately diverse; and two characterised as highly diverse (one had a large Chinese population, the other a large Arabic-speaking population). Suburbs of similar socio-economic status were selected to minimise the influence of socio-economic differences on book selection processes. The public libraries in the five identified suburbs were approached by email or letter (Appendix B), along with the participant information sheet. Only two of the original suburbs identified (referred to as Hartland and Thornbury) agreed to participate. A replacement mid-ethnic diversity suburb (Somerville) was later found.

The librarians interviewed were also invited to assist the researcher to recruit parents/guardians for the project. I was invited to speak directly to parents/guardians present at ‘Storytime’ at Hartland and Thornbury libraries and was also permitted to distribute information leaflets at this time (Appendix C). This recruitment channel was chosen because these parents/guardians had demonstrated an interest in reading books to their children, through their participation in library activities. The parents/guardians at these library sessions were friendly and were willing to briefly discuss their impressions of picture books. However, they were reluctant to devote more time to the project. This recruitment method proved ineffective, in part due to the timing (just prior to Christmas 2013). Only one participant, a Chinese-Australian mother, was recruited through a library ‘Storytime’ session. The majority of parents were recruited through word of mouth and snowballing. Several non-Anglo-Australian parents were also purposefully targeted and invited to participate. Overall, three librarians (Table 3.1) and twelve parents (Table 3.2) were interviewed.

Table 3.1 Participant profiles – librarians

Library	Librarian (pseudonym)	Job title	Roles	Interview Date
Hartland	Joyce	Children and youth services librarian	Responsible for collections from 0-18 years and programs from 0-12 years.	21/11/2013
Somerville	Jen	Children and young adult services team leader	In charge of running the children’s programs and talking to schools.	18/12/2013
Thornbury	Lydia	Thornbury librarian	Responsible for coordinating children’s programs and delivering them.	25/11/2013

Table 3.2 Participant profiles – parents

Parent (pseudonym)	Recruitment method	Ethnicity	Location ¹	Age and gender* of child/ren	Interview Date
Louise	Word of mouth	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	1 ² (F)	04/12/2013
Vanessa	Word of mouth	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	5 (F)	18/12/2013
Marian	Word of mouth	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	2,4,6,8 (F,F,M,M)	04/11/2013 31/01/2014
Charlotte	Word of mouth	Anglo Australian/ Chinese/Polynesian	Illawarra	1,3 (M,M)	10/01/2014
Stella	Snowballing	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	4,6 (F,M)	23/12/2013
Sarah	Snowballing	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	3,6 (M,M)	23/12/2013
Marissa	Snowballing	Anglo-Australian	Illawarra	3 (F)	
Lee	Library	Chinese	Sydney	3,5 (M,F)	06/12/2013
Jacinta & Kai	Purposeful	Indian & Malaysian Chinese	Sydney	8 (M)	18/01/2014
Peter	Purposeful	Tanzanian	Sydney	4 (F)	16/01/2014
Andrea	Purposeful	Greek	Sydney	1 (F)	17/01/2014

* F: female; M: male

There were several limitations in the participant sample. The main limitation was the lack of Indigenous voices. Also, ten of twelve parents interviewed were female. These limitations are discussed further at the end of the chapter.

3.4 Qualitative methods and framework

For the participants of this study, reading and choosing picture books was a part of everyday life. Qualitative research methods were appropriate as they enable participants to explain their individual human experiences, in an open-ended manner (Winchester and Rofo, 2000). The methods used were semi-structured interviews, library/home visits and observation and photographs of books. This combination of

¹ Broader areas are used to maintain confidentiality.

² At the time of the interviews, a few children were either not yet a preschooler or had passed this stage. The parents of older children reflected on their children's younger years, as well as current practices. Those with very young children discussed how their picture book selection would change as their child/ren grew.

methods enabled me to gather greater insights into participants' values and practices and ensured research rigour (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

As explained in Chapter 2, this project approached children's picture books as potential sites of everyday multiculturalism – as 'spaces' which afford children opportunities to engage with people from other ethnic backgrounds to their own and with distinct cultural practices. Rather than considering picture books as *representations* of an external reality, the interview questions were designed to ascertain how characters and storylines from children's picture books populate children's everyday lives (Russ and Wallace, 2013).

The project also positioned children's picture books as part of the material culture of library and home spaces. It was thus important to develop an insight into the positioning of children's picture books within these spaces; and their prioritisation and organisation within larger library collections and within domestic space. The interview schedules were designed to include questions pertaining to the physical location of children's picture books; and the home visits and library tours enabled the researcher to observe this positioning first hand and to take photographic records.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview schedule was used as the main method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews are useful for gathering information about participants' opinions and experiences (Dunn, 2010). They allow for in-depth conversations between the researcher and the research participants and accommodate for the participants' individuality. Prior to interviews, the proposed interview schedule was piloted with two mothers (Charlotte and Marian) of preschool aged children and was subsequently refined. The questions in the interview schedule were designed to meet the research aims (See Table 3.3 for an overview; Appendix D for the full interview schedule).

Table 3.3 Project aims and relevant interview questions

Research aims	Questions
How do adults select picture books?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does it take for a picture book to be added to the library's collection?• If there is a system/process can you describe it?• What makes a good picture book?• When selecting picture books, do you check the contents?• What do you look for? Or avoid?
Is ethnic diversity taken into account?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the ethnicity of the characters affect how you choose books?• Have you ever purposely chosen a book that portrays a particular ethnic group?• Have you ever purposely rejected a picture book because of the way it portrays a particular ethnic group?• How does the nature of the neighbourhood/community that this library is located in influence its picture book collection?
Picture books as spaces for multicultural encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have you ever spoken to child/ren about the ethnic backgrounds of characters in the books you read to them?• How do/es your child/ren engage with book characters
Material culture: value of picture books in library/home spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would you mind showing me where you keep your picture books?• Are there different categories/types of books that are kept in different places?• Why did you decide to keep them in this particular place/room?

3.4.2 Library visits and observation

Each library was visited on more than one occasion. During the semi-structured interviews with the librarians it was important to view the children's library section firsthand. Observing the location of the children's section, the range of books and how they are displayed, helped in thinking of the picture books as material culture. I also watched three 'Storytime' sessions to observe how these are conducted and the picture books used.

3.4.3 Home visits and observation

Home visits were useful to observe the home picture book collections firsthand. I was able to observe the location of books within the home, how they are ordered and

displayed. Several parents showed me relevant picture books during the interviews, including ‘favourites’.

3.4.4 Photography in library and home spaces

The spatial arrangements of picture book collections were captured visually through photography, with permission. I was able to photograph books on library display shelves and regular shelves; as well as those kept in separate ‘community language’ areas. In homes, I was able to photograph books that are left within reach for children’s easy access and independent reading; and those that are kept safely out-of-reach. I also photographed significant books that were mentioned during interviews. As discussed in Chapter 4, these photographs provide an indication of the value attributed to children’s picture books within the material spaces of both library and home.

3.4.5 Data analysis and coding

The interviews were digitally recorded, with permission. Comments, impressions and summaries of important points were written down in a research journal immediately after each interview. Recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were then analysed and used as quotations throughout the results chapters of this thesis. The data were deconstructed through narrative analysis using similar themes and patterns to code the transcripts. Narrative analysis is a tool for geographers to make sense of the life stories of participants in order to understand the dynamics of everyday life (Wiles *et al.*, 2005). Thus, it is a useful tool for analysing the qualitative data (Lawler, 2002) collected on librarians’ and parents’ picture book selection processes.

3.5 Conclusion and limitations

This chapter has described the methods that were employed in this research. Using narrative analysis, it was possible to interpret the data within the conceptual frameworks of everyday multiculturalism and material culture, in accordance with the project aims. Limitations of the methods used included the small sample size and the

restriction on being able to include certain population groups – such as children and Indigenous participants. It would have been useful to observe children - at pretend play - as well as talk to them about the picture books they liked to read. Parents' accounts of these activities can only provide a partial insight into the extent to which children engage with picture books as *more-than-representations* and thus confront opportunities for everyday multicultural encounters. The absence of Indigenous perspectives is particularly disappointing given evidence (collected during my Directed Studies project) of the mis-representation of Indigenous Australians in picture books. Due to time constraints, various other adults who play a role in shaping and selecting children's picture books were not included in this study, for instance, early childhood educators, publishers, authors and illustrators. Their perspectives would have provided additional insights into the project. The next chapter is the first of three results chapters. It discusses picture books as part of the material culture of home and library spaces.

Chapter 4 Picture books as material culture in library and home spaces

Studies of material culture explore how people's values and identities are informed by the objects they surround themselves with. These values are formed through people's backgrounds, current circumstances, relationships and their everyday lives (Miller, 2008). Geographers such as Rose (2000; 2003) and Divya Tolia-Kelly (2004) have found a material culture approach useful, particularly as it allows them to look at people's values and perspectives through their relationships with objects. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how picture books are displayed, arranged, engaged with and valued as a part of the material culture of library and home spaces. First, this chapter analyses the layout of children's sections within libraries; how they are designed, how the books are displayed, which books are kept together, which books are separate and the motivations behind these decisions. As noted in Chapter 2, most research relating to libraries' perceived role as sites of everyday multiculturalism has lost sight of the books themselves. This chapter focuses attention on children's picture books as part of the material culture of libraries and provides a foundation for a more detailed exploration (in Chapter 5) of the significance of children's picture books in constituting libraries as multicultural spaces.

Second, this chapter describes the significance of home book collections as part of the material culture of domestic spaces in households with young children. This includes an exploration of how picture books make their way into the home, where they are placed, how they are arranged and what value they hold. The chapter reveals that parents of young children place a high value on picture books and that picture books (and their location within the home) act to constitute them as particular types of parents – that is, as parents who value their young children's education and development. The chapter provides a foundation for a more detailed exploration (in Chapter 6) of the significance of children's picture books as sites of multicultural encounters in the home, through reading and pretend play.

4.1 Picture books in library spaces

Three libraries were involved in this research project (see Table 3.1). Pseudonyms are used to refer to libraries and librarians in accordance with the ethics protocol for this study. Hartland Library is a central city library in an ethnically diverse area of about 26,000 people, of whom 68.4 percent were born overseas. Somerville Library is the central library in its region with a smaller, moderately diverse population of approximately 9,900. Thornbury is a small, suburban district library in a suburb of 5,600 residents, with minimal ethnic diversity (ABS, 2011). All three libraries have a separate section dedicated to young children and children's picture books. These sections are designed to encourage young children to select and read picture books independently.

4.1.1 Layout and objects in children's sections within the libraries

The children's sections within the libraries are all situated toward the interior, away from the entrance, in a separate safe space:

[C]hildren are very physical, children run around, children are very small, so it's a good idea to take them away from the others. The other reason is if you have a kid who's a runner... they don't run out onto the street and that's a very big consideration especially with toddlers... (Joyce, Hartland).

Both Lydia (Thornbury) and Jen (Somerville) also noted that picture book sections are configured to allow librarians to run their children's programs, such as 'Storytime'. Large, open spaces that allow groups of children and parents to gather and participate are needed (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Large open space: Somerville's children's section

The children's sections in the three libraries are colourful with designs and picture displays, mats to sit or lie down on, little chairs and tables, toys to play with, as well as the picture books themselves. Lydia mentioned the importance of having everything in the one spot:

I guess keeping it all together for that age group in one area and there's a lot of room for them to sit on the floor, sit at the tables, for them to sit on the rug and to lie down and read the books (Lydia, Thornbury).

At Thornbury Library the children's section is located towards the back of the building. There is a large mat for children to sit and read, or play on, as well as small sized tables and chairs for them to use. These items are surrounded by display shelves of picture books. This library also has a mural of the local community beach on the wall, which connects the library space to the outside world (Figure 4.2):

...they see the toys and they know instantly that that's an area for them. They belong in that area. And the mural on the wall is very nice because it's a picture of our local beach, so it connects them to things they do outside of the library (Lydia, Thornbury).



Figure 4.2: Decorations and toys at Thornbury

The children's section at Somerville Library is set out quite similarly (Figure 4.1) - a large open space with a rug and toys, as well as small tables and chairs surrounded by books:

I think having an open space, with plenty of room... small chairs, we've got a mat on the floor to just make the area inviting, so they don't have to pick a book and leave (Jen, Somerville).

All three libraries have bookstands where children's books can be stored with their covers on display (Figure 4.3). There are also other types of storage such as regular shelves and boxes which take up less space. Books are placed on low shelves and in boxes so that children can access them for independent reading. The children's community language books (contained in separate sections of the libraries) are also shelved down low so that children can access them. The librarians avoid over-filling the bookshelves so that children can select and remove books from the shelves easily: 'you don't want the shelves that crowded that they [children] can't pull a book off it' (Jen, Somerville). The librarians stated that they prioritise children's ability to independently access and engage with picture books, to reach, touch and open them.



Figure 4.3: Different types of shelving at Hartland children's section

The display shelves display books with their covers showing. For example, at Somerville Library:

...you'll notice on the shelves that we have ones down the bottom, but we also have ones on display with the face out. The covers are actually more appealing and when the parent and child [are] choosing together it's probably more appealing than the ones at the bottom with the spines showing (Jen, Somerville).

The displayed book covers attract attention, especially for those browsing. However, there did not appear to be a process for determining which picture books are included on these display shelves - except perhaps the personal preferences of whoever 'tidies the shelves' (Jen, Somerville).

4.1.2 Picture books kept separately

The three libraries order their books on the shelves alphabetically, either by authors' surnames or book titles. Apart from alphabetical ordering, board books, Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC) books³, 'experience' books (dealing with a specific issue or first experience), picture books for older children/adults, oversized picture books and community language books (including bilingual books) are mostly located in separate sections.



Figure 4.4: Highly sought after PRC collection: Somerville

³ The Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC) is a program to encourage a love of reading in children and to expose them to quality literature. It is run in the different states in Australia, where the children are challenged to read a certain number of pre-selected books within a given timeframe. Many of the PRC books were on the 'notable' books lists that I used for my Directed Studies content analysis.

Thornbury and Somerville libraries both have a small section of PRC books (considered quality stories, or ‘good reads’) separated from the main shelves, for the ease of parents/children searching for books on the PRC list (Figure 4.4). Jen (Somerville) stated: ‘we always make sure we have a section of PRC books set aside’. Hartland Library no longer makes this separation due to the high quantity of the PRC books. Instead, PRC books can be identified by special stickers on the spines/front covers of books (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: PRC books interfiled: Hartland (PRC stickers circled in red and bilingual books circled in purple).

Somerville Library, in addition to PRC books, keeps a separate collection of picture books on information shelves, that deal with an issue or first experience, such as the first day of school or the death of a pet (Figure 4.6):

Sometimes we put them on the information shelves and that is because it's dealing with an issue so it might be death of a grandparent or death of a pet, divorce, first big day at school... (Jen, Somerville).

These ‘experience’ picture books are placed separately so that parents looking for a book to help with a particular issue or need can go straight to the information shelves.

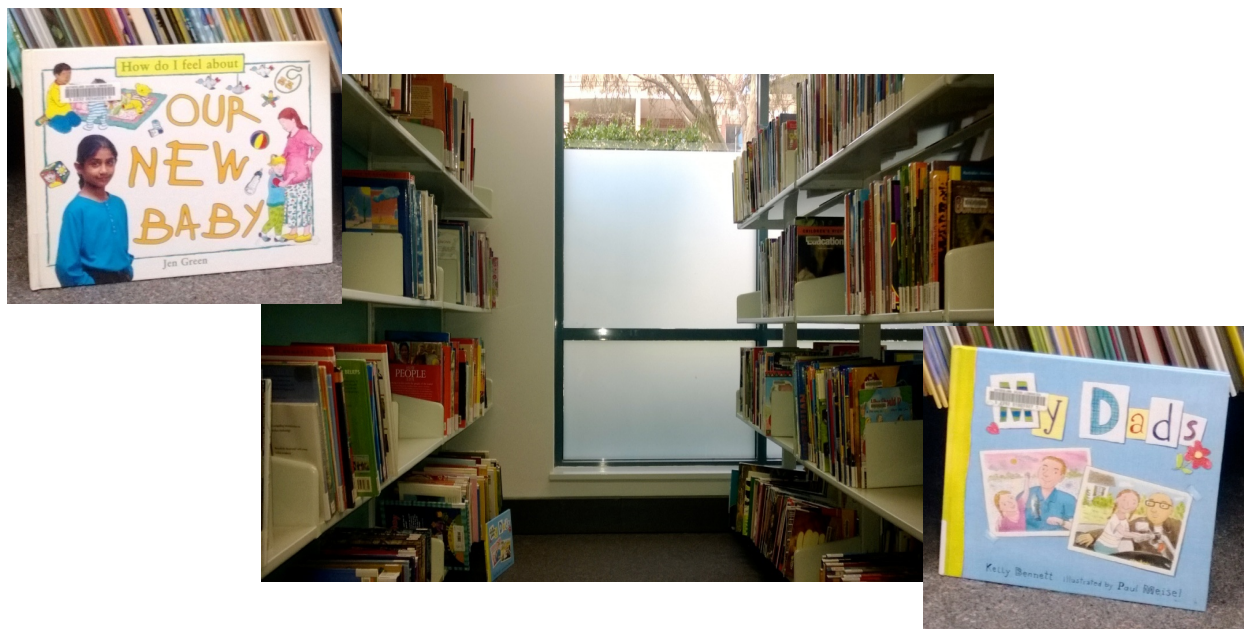


Figure 4.6: First experience books: children's information section, Somerville

Hartland and Somerville libraries have collections of community language books (books wholly in different languages) that are kept in a separate place: 'We have picture books in different languages and they are kept in their language areas' (Joyce, Hartland). These books are kept outside of the children's dedicated space, in an area dedicated to community languages (for all age groups). They are also divided by languages, for example Greek, Chinese and Arabic at Hartland and Somerville. Joyce mentioned that Hartland also has books in Hindi and Karachi. Keeping these books separate from the mainstream collection makes them readily accessible, but decreases the chance of Anglo-Australian children engaging with them. At Hartland Library, bilingual books are kept in both the main children's collection and in the community language sections (refer back to Figure 4.5).

Hartland and Somerville libraries prioritise books 'based on the community profile' (Joyce, Hartland), thus they emphasise their community language section. Hartland Library is located in a highly diverse community and Somerville in a moderately diverse one. Hartland, because of its size and ethnic diversity, has a designated librarian to organise the community language section. The section is large enough to display these picture books with their covers showing (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7: Chinese language section, Hartland

At Somerville Library, the community language books are displayed spine out, most probably due to space limitations, being a smaller library (see Figure 4.8). Thornbury Library (located in a low ethnic diversity area) does not keep community language books, but library users can make special requests.



Figure 4.8: Chinese language section, Somerville

While it is convenient to separate the community language picture books from mainstream collections, it also signifies that ethnic diversity is separated out – it is only of interest to, or of relevance for, *some* children and adults (primarily those from migrant backgrounds).

None of the librarians reported having a process for identifying or prioritising English-language picture books, including those with ethnically diverse characters. These were not identified as a priority. Given that these books are reasonably scarce (as detailed in Metusela, 2013 and Chapter 1), parents who wish to expose their children to a diverse portrayal of Australian society need to search through individual books to find them. Books portraying Indigenous Australian characters and settings are also located in the mainstream sections, presumably because they are written in English. None of the librarians reported separating ‘Australian’ books from those published in other countries.

4.1.3 Valuing books – image, contents and condition

According to the librarians, the cover of picture books can be used to denote their ‘value’. The PRC books are often given priority in their own sections and/or with noticeable stickers on their covers. Similarly, Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) award-winning books also have shiny, ‘eye-catching’ stickers. While being interfiled with the rest of the picture books, these books are set apart by their appearance (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9: CBCA (Hartland) and PRC (Thornbury) ‘eye-catching’ stickers

As discussed in further detail in Chapter 5, the librarians value quality books and this helps to determine which books are able to make their way into (and remain in) library children's collections. Somerville and Thornbury libraries do not have the luxury of viewing books before they receive them. Jen explained that she occasionally does not like a book when viewing it for the first time. Some books:

...might not be suitable to be sitting on the shelves here [the children's section] and since we don't exercise censorship... we won't remove it from the [library] collection but we might move it to the teen or junior fiction (Jen, Somerville).

In Hartland Library, however, Joyce explained that a substandard book is not welcome. She recounted one example where a library user had made a 'buy request' but:

... when it came in I looked at it and said to my boss I really don't approve of it, I don't want it in my collection. They said let them have it because they asked for it and then withdraw it. And I did, it cost me 25 bucks and one person read it and I threw it out... to me some things are not acceptable, it wasn't acceptable by the artwork, the size of the print and the story was atrocious (Joyce, Hartland).

Joyce also mentioned that she sometimes rejects books due to the format: 'if the print size is less than point 8 it's not much use'. Likewise, Joyce rejected *The diary of a wombat* where the 'stupid publisher has shrunk it down so the pictures aren't as good'. She also mentioned rejecting several books that were 'anti-environment' and that she found 'offensive'. These books were unacceptable because of their content and, therefore, discarded.

From time to time the librarians sort through the children's books and decide which books to keep. Joyce explained that they no longer keep old-fashioned picture books in their collection, except for a few examples that have been set aside: 'We don't actually have many old picture books here, but I do have a couple in the stack'. The librarians also remove books that have signs of wear and tear and thus diminished 'value':

We also have to weed the collection, so we have to get rid of older books, books that are damaged, then we'll look at ok was that popular? Is it still in print? But if it's a classic and isn't that could be an issue... If it looks... daggy dirty and horrible, you're not going to take it home... (Jen, Somerville).

Depending on their perceived value, old books are either replaced with a new copy, or deleted from the system.

4.2 Picture books in home spaces

For the parents, picture books are an important component of the material culture of their home. Books are central to the daily lives of their children. As in the libraries, their use is encouraged. The presence of picture books in general and of particular types of picture books, as well as the physical location of those books, provide insights into parents' values, their cultures of parenting and the parenting identities that they 'perform' in their everyday lives. In all of the households, picture books are read to children on a daily basis.

4.2.1 Positioning of children's picture books in the home

Within the households involved in this study, picture books are mostly kept in the loungeroom and/or in the children's bedrooms. One parent (Marian) reported storing them in her own bedroom. These locations offer easy access for daily reading and encourage children to read independently. Some families have large collections of books that are spread over several different shelves in different rooms. For example, Marian keeps the majority of the family's picture books in her bedroom, but the children's favourites and the most heavily used picture books are in their own bedrooms (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10: Marian's picture book collections: girls' room, parents' room

Sarah has a large collection of novels and picture books on different bookshelves throughout the house (Figure 4.11), but there is no clear process for deciding which books belong where:

It's more the case that the shelves get too full so I take them up[stairs to the bedrooms]... if a lot come down here [the loungeroom], I put some of them back up again and occasionally we rotate them just to see (Sarah).



Figure 4.11: Sarah's picture book collections: son's bedroom and loungeroom

Sarah prefers to have books available throughout the house because 'it's just nice to be able to pick and choose where you are to have books'.

Stella had previously kept a small collection in the loungeroom which were specifically selected to prepare her son to go to school:

... and for me too so it's like in my face and I remember [to read them], otherwise you're doing lunches and getting kids dressed... (Stella).

By placing certain books in the loungeroom, Stella was prompted to read them with her child.

Most parents thought it important for books to be organised in ways that enable them to be easily seen and accessed. In most cases, picture books are stored in the rooms where the bedtime/daily reading sessions actually occur:

[W]ell he has a double bed... so we can lie down with him in bed and read the book to him... The shelf is next to his bed so he can read books anytime and it is easy for us too when we read to him (Kai).

For Andrea, the main reading sessions occur during the day, either at the change table or during playtime. She stores a collection of small picture books on the change table and another collection in a basket in the loungeroom (Figure 4.12):

[Picture books are] quite important... So, from first thing in the morning, when she wakes up and we need to change her nappy, she's got books by the side of her change table, so we use the books to entertain her while we're changing the nappy... then... during her playtime she might come across some books amongst her toys (Andrea).



Figure 4.12: Andrea's picture book collections: daytime books and change table books

Placing her picture book collections next to the change table and in the loungeroom ensures Andrea's child has access to picture books throughout the day.

Vanessa deems it a priority for her daughter to be able to access her picture books easily. She has arranged her daughter's bedroom to accommodate this: 'I arrange her room so she can easily get her books and pull them out' (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Vanessa's picture book collection: daughter's room

Similarly, Marissa places importance on low bookshelves so that her daughter can select books independently. This is reflected in her daughter's newly arranged bedroom:

We did them [picture books] down on the low shelves so she can get them rather than up high, because obviously I like her to be able to select her own books most of the time (Marissa).

The results demonstrate that children's picture books are significant objects in these families' everyday lives. Books are kept in the 'most read' rooms of the house. They have prime positions and it is deemed essential that children have easy access to the books parents want them to read. During interviews, the parents clearly positioned the home as an important space for their children's learning.

4.2.2 Ordering the picture book collections

Parents described different ways of ordering their picture book collections, but it was important to all that their children could independently reach the books parents classed as 'appropriate'. For example, Lee has a large collection of both Chinese and English-language books that she sorts onto different shelves: 'We normally put in different lines like Chinese ones, English ones, cardboard ones or soft ones...'. When questioned on whether their books are ordered, Jacinta and Kai mentioned that they split 'bible-based' and secular books when possible. Vanessa places more delicate books in the hallway as opposed to her daughter's room in order to protect them, but still stores them in a place that her daughter can reach. She also separates out 'educational' books:

Well I do have a bit of an order and there are some in the hall that are... 3D things that could sort of break... more delicate ones I keep there and then I've kept on that other shelf ones that are I think more educational like colours and numbers and then the story ones in another place. And then by size. (Vanessa).

Children's favourite books and the books that are at their age/reading level are located in easily accessible places. Marian places board books and easy readers on the bottom shelves in her children's room, so that even her youngest child can reach them. She also keeps together the books *she* does not enjoy reading on another shelf:

There is an order, to what goes on which shelf, but not a great one... all the big ones are on the bottom shelf and then there's all the board books together and... like... early reader storybooks, they're all on one shelf and then the

books I don't like but the kids just like reading and flicking through themselves are on one shelf. So, books that I would give away or throw away but the kids still like and read to themselves (Marian).



Figure 4.14: Charlotte's picture book collection in the playroom

Charlotte has rearranged a playroom for her two boys and has placed picture books that are too advanced on higher shelves (Figure 4.14):

There's probably a couple at the top which have been bought second hand or people have given them to us that I know are too old for them at the moment, so that's just a practicality thing that they're out of reach... (Charlotte).

Similarly, Peter explained that their bookshelf (located in the loungeroom) contains his daughter's favourite books while those that are not age-appropriate are stored away in cabinets:

Ok, those are her favourite books, so it's easy to reach, somewhere where she can just hop off the couch and just get them. While the others are, either they're too old for her or for younger children maybe, so we don't use them anymore (Peter).

Louise has divided her collection into two parts (Figure 4.15). The more valued picture books are placed on a higher shelf, out of reach, to protect them while her daughter is still quite young. These books, (classics and the parents' favourites) can only be touched under parental supervision. The lower shelf has a collection of cheaper books and board books for her daughter to play with whenever she wants.

Louise explained that she is using these books to teach her child how to treat books with care:

...she reads all day. One of her first words was 'book', that's why she has her own section of books that she can pull out... I want her to be able to still touch books and learn that they're not to be ripped (Louise).



Figure 4.15: 'Valued' books shelved above 'rubbish' books⁴

Louise expressed a desire to prolong the life of the picture books she values, so she controls access to them by placing them out of her daughter's reach. Her daughter's 'own section of books', that Louise does not value as highly, are placed on lower shelves.

In other cases, books that are *disliked* by parents end up on higher shelves amongst books for older ages. For example, Andrea, has a shelf full of books that either do not fit in her playtime basket or are too old for her daughter. Amongst these books are the books that she does not like (Figure 4.16):

[T]here is one... it's got quite a dark message, it's a bit depressing...the story and the theme is really quite dark, so I've actually consciously left that one on the shelf... it's *Moby Dick*... (Andrea).

Books that Andrea considers inappropriate for her child are placed out of reach where her daughter cannot access them.

⁴ See section 4.2.3 about Louise's comment on 'rubbish' books.



Figure 4.16: Shelf 'out of reach' and 'depressing' book

The spatial preference given to objects in the home - in this case, picture books - is of significance, particularly as the participants' values and perspectives can be examined through their relationships with these objects (Bennett, 2001; Rose, 2000; 2003; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Parents' strategies for ordering books demonstrate hierarchies of value. Their systems for ordering books subtly define their parenting identities. The books that parents dislike, or consider bad for their children, are put out of the way. Books that they value highly are also put out of the way – but in order to protect them. The books that are neither maligned by parents, nor highly prized, are located within children's reach. The picture books that parents choose to include as part of the material culture of the home and the books that they choose to make accessible (or inaccessible) reflect particular parenting ideals. Parents value their children reading and engaging with books but their responsibility does not end at making books available to their children - they are responsible for making sure that only appropriate books are within reach.

4.2.3 *Losing value*

Picture books can take up a lot of space. When asked what they will do when their bookshelves fill up, many parents said they would make more room by adding bookshelves or removing books. Favourite picture books of the children and/or parents are usually kept. Those that no longer have a designated purpose or value are given away to friends with younger children, or to charity:

I'm quite a good person for chucking things and keeping some very special ones... The next books to go will probably be the colour and counting books, she's getting beyond that (Vanessa).

As well as giving away books, Peter also stores books that are no longer read:

I'll probably store the books that she's outgrown... maybe if she has a sibling then they can use them... and then get newer books as she grows, that's what I'll do... That's been the culture of the family from her mum's side, all the books have been stored somewhere in boxes like in the attic. So I assume they won't get chucked away... (Peter).

Although Marian does give away some books her children have grown out of, she would prefer to have another bookshelf added:

I struggle to throw or give away but I know that I can't possibly read them all, very often... I'd just get another bookshelf, that's why they're all on different bookshelves now because they've gotten bigger (Marian).

Likewise, Andrea would rather expand her collection by adding extra shelves/baskets:

...probably get more shelving and more baskets. I like books and I'd like her to grow up with a love for books so I think we'd just find more space for books... (Andrea).

Many parents mentioned getting rid of picture books that they do not like. Parents reported enforcing their own values, irrespective of their children's own likes and dislikes. Marian, for example, said: 'I struggle getting rid of books, unless I didn't like them'. Similarly, Marissa said 'I would get rid of ones I don't like without her [the daughter] noticing'. Likewise, Charlotte makes 'rubbish' books disappear:

My older son has this series of these tiny little 'Bob the builder' books that are pretty rubbishy. He loves them, I prefer not to read them so I tend to make them disappear bit by bit... (Charlotte).

Sarah also tries to 'shuffle' gift books that she does not like, 'out of the way'. Stella mentioned giving books she does not like to the 'Salvation Army or other kids to pass them on'. Louise also identified certain books as 'rubbish' and explained that they mean nothing to her:

You know I go to those \$5 bookshops and that bottom shelf just epitomises what's there. If it gets wrecked it doesn't matter they're just rubbish. But like I said, we teach my daughter with those to be careful but I don't care about those books... they mean nothing to me, they're just rubbish (Louise).

For Peter, some books are so ‘bad’ that he prefers the idea of throwing them away so that other children are not exposed to them:

Maybe some of the ones I don’t like [I] might give them away or just put them maybe in the bin so no more children can get exposed to that (Peter).

The results show that parenting identities are performed *through* parents’ engagement with picture books as part of the material culture of the home. This is demonstrated, for example, in parents’ feelings towards picture books given to their children by others, such as the commercial and branded ones and how they deal with books they consider ‘rubbish’. Books with little or no value *to parents* are regularly discarded. This is expanded upon in Chapter 6, with a discussion of branded and commercial books that are particularly disliked by parents. Parents often spoke about picture books as their own possessions, or as joint possessions with their children. They talked about the books that *they* like to read and they often unilaterally got rid of books if *they* did not like them.

4.2.4 *Personal value to the parents*

Some picture books have strong personal value to parents. Books from childhood, for example, can carry fond memories that parents wish to pass down to their children. When Louise was a child, she chose a picture book as an award at school for the purpose of reading to her baby brother. It is due to this memory that this book has survived in her collection:

...this book I kept because when I was in primary school, I got this in 1990 when I was in year one and I got the award for coming first in the class and I picked this book... and I picked it because I read this to my brother. He was one when I got this book and I read a different story to him every night and that’s sort of why I want to keep this book for my daughter. It was kind of a bit of a lesson, it’s not always about you (Louise).

This particular book links Louise to her past and her relationship with her family. Similarly, Tolia-Kelly’s (2004:680) research demonstrated that objects can be ‘fragments of biographies’ that represent relationships that extend beyond the home. Louise also commented that she would like to bring into her home favourite books that are still stored at her mother’s house:

There's a few books that I would like to get and I['ve] still got a lot of books at my mum's... but since we don't have heaps of space they'd have to be books that are meaningful to me, not just for the sake of it (Louise).

As objects of material culture these books have a sense of meaning to Louise (Miller, 2010b). If they are not meaningful – they do not hold value, therefore, she is not interested in keeping them.

Favourite books that are worn or destroyed still hold some value. For example, one of Charlotte's favourite books was no longer usable. She explained that she plans to replace it with a new copy as it is valuable to her:

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes, the Mem Fox book, that was down to... every second page was separate and chewed off and I thought, I know I'm going to replace that book because I really love that book. It's one that I wanna replace but it's completely unusable as it is at the moment (Charlotte).

Charlotte loves this particular book and considers it worthwhile to purchase a new copy. Parents talked about their children's favourites, as well as their own, revealing the value parents place on certain types of books - 'allowing' them to remain in the home, but discarding others that were deemed inappropriate.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how picture books are displayed, arranged, engaged with and valued as a part of the material culture of library and home spaces. The participants' comments concurred with Bennett (2001), Rose (2000; 2003) and Tolia-Kelly's (2004) findings that the spatial preference given to objects – in this case picture books – demonstrates the value placed on them. Much planning goes into children's sections within libraries, with the location, appearance and contents. Children's sections are placed in spaces that are of low risk, away from building entrances. The furnishings and decorations are used to create an atmosphere that promotes reading. The picture books are ordered alphabetically and placed accessibly to encourage independent access. The arrangement of different *types* of picture books within libraries (for instance, PRC books) is instructive about the value placed on them by librarians, so too are the filtering processes by which certain books (which were never valued, or which have lost their value) make their way out of children's

collections (and in some cases, into the rubbish bin). Of particular significance to this study is the spatial arrangement of community language books – these are separated out, away from the mainstream children's picture bookshelves, in an entirely different part of the library. This positioning suggests that these books are only considered to be of value/interest to ethnic minority audiences, rather than a range of library users. In addition, Australian books portraying ethnically diverse characters are not prioritised in library picture book collections, an issue that is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Home picture books collections are also highly valued and used daily. Parents put a great deal of thought and effort into arrangements and rearrangements of these collections (as found by Bennett (2001) in her research on attachments to objects). Picture books are usually stored on shelves, in boxes or baskets in rooms that have the most book interaction such as the loungeroom or the bedroom. Books that parents consider appropriate for their children are stored on low shelves to encourage independent selection. Books that no longer serve their purpose of entertaining or teaching, those which are too tattered, which are disliked (usually by parents), not read anymore or which are 'too young', are put away for younger siblings, given away or thrown out. Certain books from the parents' childhood, accumulate meaning and sentimental value and maintain their place within the collection – usually out of reach for safeguarding. The presence of particular types of picture books in the home, as well as the physical location of those books, subtly defines the participants' parenting values and ideals (concurrent with findings by Bennett, 2001; Rose, 2000; 2003; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). They constitute the parents as people who value reading and their children's education and also as people who do not want their children exposed to 'rubbish' or inappropriate messages. The next chapter explores, in more depth, the book selection process adopted by librarians and the significance of children's picture books in constituting libraries as multicultural spaces.

Chapter 5 How librarians select picture books for children: what's ethnicity got to do with it?

The aim of this chapter is to better understand how librarians select picture books for preschool aged children. Libraries are particularly significant as they are the main accessible free public service for preschoolers outside the home, providing written and visual material for entertainment as well as for education (McKechnie, 2000). The following sections describe the selection methods used by librarians and the factors and priorities influencing these processes. The chapter also investigates whether/how ethnic diversity (of characters and children) is taken into account when selecting picture books. As mentioned in Chapter 2, libraries have been a focus of study in terms of multicultural encounters. Such literature has prioritised social interactions between people in library spaces, to the exclusion of the books themselves (Aabo and Audunson, 2012; Wise and Velayutham, 2009). Yet the content of books can also expose readers to ethnic diversity. This chapter explores the extent to which librarians perceive children's picture books as having a role in constituting libraries as multicultural spaces. As discussed in Chapter 3, this study included only three libraries/librarians, limiting the extent to which broader conclusions can be drawn. The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition of the suburbs in which the three participating libraries were located, in order to better understand the types of communities for which they cater.

5.1 Understanding librarians' picture book selection process

5.1.1 Library profiles

Pseudonyms are used to refer to libraries and librarians in accordance with the ethics protocol for this study (refer back to Table 3.1). Hartland Library is the central library in the city of Hartland which has an approximate population of 26,000. The city is ethnically diverse: 69.4 percent of its residents were born overseas, mainly in China. The main languages spoken at home in Hartland are English, Mandarin and

Cantonese (ABS, 2011). Somerville Library is also the central library in its region, although Somerville has a significantly smaller population of 9,900 and is moderately diverse. Most residents are Australian born (70.1%), although there are growing populations from New Zealand, China, India and the Philippines. Most households (77.7%) speak only English at home, although there are some Mandarin, Spanish, Russian, Cantonese and Arabic speakers (ABS, 2011). Thornbury is a suburban district library in a suburb of 5,600 residents, with minimal ethnic diversity (81.3% of residents are Australian born). Residents who were not born in Australia are primarily of British ancestry and 91.7 percent speak only English in the home (ABS, 2011).

5.1.2 Librarians' priorities: what makes a good picture book?

Librarians play an important role in shaping the collections that library patrons can access. The three librarians who were interviewed share the same key priority when selecting picture books – quality. Quality incorporates content, format and binding:

What you look for is appropriateness of print size, illustrations, content matter, number of words, who wrote it, who is the illustrator. Whether it fulfils the function of being an information book or whether it's emotions... all those things come into consideration (Joyce, Hartland).

Illustrations play a major part in telling the story to young audiences. The librarians prioritised clear illustrations that match the story:

...that's a huge thing when you're studying a picture book... it's supposed to tell a story... it is also how those pictures convey that story (Jen, Somerville).

The story itself is also important, it has to 'have an actual story, beginning, middle and an ending' (Lydia, Thornbury) and it has to be of interest to young children:

Not necessarily simplicity, it might be a reasonably wordy picture book but whatever is in the story is going to hold that child to keep listening or reading it themselves (Jen, Somerville).

For Joyce a good picture book has to have an effect on the reader:

It's something that when you pick it up and read it makes you think... And it doesn't matter whether it's giving you an idea or giving you a concept or just giving you a sense of happiness or a sense of sadness as long as it has some effect upon you then it's a good picture book (Joyce, Hartland).

For Jen there needs to be a message or, if not, a picture book must at least be entertaining:

So I think it has to have a bit of message in there. If it doesn't, it's simply a great read aloud with rhyming and lyrical and basically very silly and funny and enjoyable (Jen, Somerville).

Themes set around children's day-to-day experiences, as well as books encouraging children's imagination, are favoured by librarians:

It's simple things like... where a child is able to explore things in a mind of their own and put it back into reality too (Joyce, Hartland).

However, specific themes or topics are not necessarily considered a point for rejection. When asked if they had ever rejected a book because of the way it portrayed a certain ethnic group Lydia (Thornbury) replied: 'we would never say no to a book'. Thornbury and Somerville have a no censorship policy and are obligated to accept all books that their suppliers send (this is explained further in section 5.1.3). Another key consideration mentioned by the librarians was the page format - the print size needs to be large enough for children to read, yet there has to be a balance between text and pictures on a page. The way the book is bound is also important as books need to be durable enough to withstand frequent handling by children.

The libraries usually hold several copies of books of well-known authors and illustrators as well as 'classics', but librarians also reported being on the lookout for emerging authors and illustrators:

I'm always looking, I love looking for new picture books whether it's by authors that I love...or something new, so that's why I get excited by children's book week⁵. I always find something new (Jen, Somerville).

Award winning books and those on the notable children's book lists from the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) are sought after as well as the book week books. Jen also noted that books incorporating dinosaurs and fairies and books based on ABC television shows, are often selected due to popular demand – even if the story is a bit 'airy fairy'. Jen also said (but only after being prompted by the interviewer) that Somerville Library would buy picture books with a multicultural

⁵ Bookweek is a week-long children's festival run by the CBCA to promote a 'joy of reading'. Each year there is a new theme and many schools, libraries, teachers/librarians hold activities and competitions to do with that theme.

theme, particularly if they are Australian published. This was a common trend in the librarian interviews. Ethnic diversity did not appear to be a primary concern.

5.1.3 Methods of acquiring books

All three librarians are responsible for children's 'Storytime' programs and are involved in their libraries' book selection processes. The extent of their involvement in the latter differed substantially. Both Jen (Somerville) and Lydia (Thornbury) described using similar methods to acquire picture books for their libraries. Jen mentioned that in the past booksellers used to visit librarians and that they were able to view picture books before selecting them. However, both Jen and Lydia now have to make decisions without viewing the books in person. They have both developed profiles for desirable books, which they give to their suppliers:

We have very broad selection criteria and we actually get our books pre-publication so we don't get to look at them... We have a very broad instruction to our suppliers that is basically anything that will be interesting about the world around them to children... (Lydia, Thornbury).

Jen explained that suppliers send blurbs describing the books that are due to come out and that librarians make their decisions based on these blurbs together with book review journals:

So basically it's a blurb, a publisher blurb from our suppliers... they've been given a guide by us [of] what it is we want to see... Something we do is look through journals to guide us... what they do, is... give you blurbs of what they're about, maybe a copy of the cover, but actually quite a good preview of the book. Plus interviews with authors and publishers... about what's coming out (Jen, Somerville).

Joyce has closer control over the selection of picture books at her library, which is located in a highly multicultural area. She has the opportunity to view picture books before they are bought: 'I won't buy a book that I haven't read' (Joyce). Joyce uses several suppliers to provide a broad range of picture books for the local community. In addition, as part of Hartland's purchasing policy, parents have some control in the selection process:

...we allow the parents to do a lot of the buying... at least once a term, we'll have a buying session at preschool programs... So a certain part of the budget is chosen by the borrowers themselves (Joyce, Hartland).

The books chosen by the parents are added to the library's collection:

... a bookseller comes in with books, you lay them all out on the table and give them [the parents] post-it notes. They put a post-it note on every book they want.... You look at the ones that everyone wanted and you might buy several copies of those... [but if] it's a book I don't think is very good... I only buy one. If they've chosen it, they still get it, but I'm not going to get multiple copies if I don't think it's a very good book (Joyce).

While Hartland Library engages with the local community in their book selection process, the librarians are still the final decision-makers.

5.1.4 Catering for local communities

The librarians were asked if the demographic composition of the local community affected their picture book selection. All three librarians indicated that they aim to provide a wide range of picture books. As discussed in Chapter 4, the libraries hold community language books for this purpose. Hartland Library, due to its location in a highly diverse suburb, contains a large number of community language books, with Chinese books being a priority. Somerville Library also has separate shelves containing picture books in commonly spoken community languages such as Chinese, Arabic and Greek. Thornbury Library, a smaller district library in a low-diversity suburb, orders bilingual books or community language books if requested by community members, but does not keep a permanent collection.

Importantly, when the librarians addressed the topic of ethnicity, it was largely in terms of providing books to cater for communities who speak a language other than English. They did not report prioritising portrayals of ethnic diversity *within* English-language books. The librarians' appeared to view ethnically diverse books as a means catering specifically (and separately) for ethnic minority audiences, not for the ethnic majority. Their general comments about ethnic diversity, included in the discussion below, were made in response to interview questions that prompted them to discuss these issues.

Of the three librarians, Joyce focuses the most on including picture books that cater for diverse ethnic groups, most likely because her library is located in a high-diversity

area. Somerville's migrant population has increased in recent years, thus Jen is now more aware of buying picture books with a multicultural theme:

...anything that's done Australian [Australian published] that has that theme [multicultural] we will buy because I think you need to have it available... Because we are getting more [migrants] moving into the area and I know for... very dark skinned children sometimes it is hard... for another child to be staring at them (Jen, Somerville).

However, ethnic diversity was not described as a main criterion in the 'mainstream' picture book selection process. As Joyce explained, the priority is providing 'good' picture books:

...you're still buying the best books you can, ethnicity isn't the major part of it... If it's a bad picture book, I don't care what language it is, I don't care where it comes from... That isn't a first point of criteria, I mean I would not buy a book just because it had a black or an Aboriginal character in it if it wasn't a very good one, but I wouldn't deliberately go and reject something because it's white either. It's just gotta be a good book and the characters are peripheral (Joyce, Hartland).

Joyce explained that children relate to everyday situations and settings in picture books that are similar to their own. While she acknowledged that the children in Hartland are used to mingling with people of different ethnicities, they are 'living a western life', irrespective of their birthplace. Joyce argued that picture books should portray the common everyday experiences and settings of children's lives, such as 'going to school'. She downplayed the ways in which schools are experienced *differently* by children. This seems an important oversight given evidence that ethnic minority children are regularly exposed to discrimination in everyday routine situations (Priest, 2014). Joyce appeared to adopt a colourblind perspective (Freeman, 2005; Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Fesperman, 2013). She argued that children's current circumstances (not their ancestries) determine the books they need:

[W]hoever the child is and wherever they come from isn't as important as where they are at the moment and that's what you're fitting the book to... If that kid has just cried... because they stubbed their toe... get them a nice happy book that will fit in with where they are at the moment. Don't worry about what background they are, this is their need now... (Joyce, Hartland).

Ethnic diversity is clearly not a main priority for the librarians involved in this study when selecting picture books for their collections. When the librarians spoke of incorporating ethnic diversity, it was specifically to cater for ethnic minority library

patrons via separate community language collections. When prompted, the librarians indicated that they try to incorporate a diverse range of picture books in the mainstream collection, however, this is not a key criterion. In keeping with the findings of Metusela (2013), Joyce (Hartland) also noted that ethnically diverse picture books can be difficult to find. Joyce argued that, in the future, Australia's migrant communities might themselves contribute ethnically diverse picture books: 'They've only been here a while, these kids will grow up and write their own picture books'.

5.1.5 Selecting picture books for library 'Storytime' sessions

'Storytime' sessions provide further scope for librarians to influence the range of picture books to which children are exposed. All of the libraries involved in this research offer 'Storytime' sessions for babies (0-18 months), toddlers (2-3 years) and preschoolers (3-5 years). In addition, Hartland offers a Chinese-language 'Storytime' session for children (0-5 years). 'Storytime' sessions usually involve picture books, songs and simple activities and are open to the community. All three librarians indicated that they are responsible for running 'Storytime' programs. The choice of books for these sessions provides important insights into factors that librarians prioritise when selecting picture books for children.

Packs of picture books focusing on particular themes are prepared for 'Storytime' sessions by librarians. The themes are usually something that children can relate to, enjoy or learn something from, such as pets, food, colours, seasons or going to school. Picture books qualify for a 'Storytime' session if they are of an appropriate length, can hold children's attention and have sufficiently large illustrations for a crowd of children to see. With the exception of Hartland Library's Chinese-language 'Storytime' sessions, the stories should have well written English with illustrations matching the words. The content must not be offensive: 'non-racist, non-sexist, no ism... unless it is making a point about something' (Joyce, Hartland). Books that allow for audience participation were described as ideal (Figure 5.1):

One of my favourite books to read at 'Storytime' is *Where is the Green Sheep?* That's a great book for that age, because it teaches them things without them realising they're being taught and it also is really good for interaction and they become involved with the stories. Another one is *We're Going on a*

Bear Hunt. That's a great one because of the repetition and the rhyme and they can again join in and they know what's coming next and it's got a bit of action/movement in it too so they can move around (Lydia, Thornbury).



Figure 5.1: Where is the Green Sheep? (Mem Fox); We're Going on a Bear Hunt (Michael Rosen)

The 'Storytime' packs usually contain several books on the particular theme for the day, which means the books can be matched to the age of the audience on any given day. At Somerville Library, a multicultural 'Storytime' pack is used on occasion:

...at one 'Storytime' we might have a multicultural pack so we'll make [sure] that there's enough in there to explain... it might not necessarily be that we're reading multicultural books but that we are chatting to them and having that diversity (Jen, Somerville).

As with the broader picture book selection process, ethnic diversity was not identified as a key priority for these librarians when selecting books for 'Storytime' sessions. Instead, they reported focusing on stories that can be read to large crowds of young children. The opportunity to use picture books to foster a sense of 'everyday multiculturalism' was not identified by the librarians involved in this study. The following section explores this issue in greater detail.

5.2 Multicultural encounters *with* children's picture books

In the literature, libraries have been identified as important sites for multicultural encounters (Wise and Velayutham, 2009; Aabo and Audunson, 2012). However, the focus has been on the social interactions that take place in library spaces, not on the

books themselves. In this thesis, I argue that the content of books - words and pictures – can introduce readers to new cultural worlds and expose them to multicultural encounters. This section outlines the librarians’ understandings of the importance of picture books for children and their perceptions of Australian picture books in particular. It then explores the librarians’ responses to specific questions on the types of characters that are ‘missing’ from, or under-represented within, picture books and how these absences may affect children.

5.2.1 The importance of picture books

The librarians all emphasised the importance of reading picture books to children:

...even as an adult, I remember the picture books that my parents read to me and there’s nothing like that sense of being read to and I think that children bring that from their childhood right through... I think reading to children is probably one of the best gifts you can give them as a parent (Lydia, Thornbury).

Picture books provide shared experiences between family members, forming special bonds or relationships:

[W]e encourage older siblings to read to younger siblings... I think a picture book allows you to share the experience and I think that to me is one of the biggest things (Jen, Somerville).

The librarians stated that picture books can help children to deal with specific issues they are facing, such as toilet training or learning manners:

It’s really nice when a parent comes in and says look we’re having trouble with toilet training or something like that and to actually give them a story to help the child relate better (Jen, Somerville).

Moreover, picture books can help children to understand themselves and their place in the world, by reflecting their life-experiences:

Yes, it helps them to connect their experiences and they can kind of work out where they are in the world because other people experience that stuff too. So they learn a lot (Lydia, Thornbury).

Picture books also help children to learn and experience new things: ‘Picture books I think play a big role in showing children’s different ways [of life]’ (Lydia, Thornbury). In this way, picture books can open up new worlds for children. Joyce

argued that keeping children away from books potentially denies them infinite possibilities:

I can tell you what happens if you don't give children picture books... then you've just closed the world to them. What effect any picture book has on a child, depends on the child, depends on the child's environment. The point is the fact that they've had a look at a picture book [and that] has already changed them. We want to get them thinking about something or even experiencing something. Even the worst picture book in the world is better than none (Joyce, Hartland).

The librarians clearly place a high level of importance on reading picture books to children and understand the enormous significance of picture books in children's lives. However, while they acknowledged that picture books can help children to become comfortable with challenging experiences, expose children to new experiences and help them to establish their place in the world – this did not appear to shape their perceptions of the importance of providing books incorporating ethnic diversity. This omission is of concern given evidence, outlined in Chapter 1, that picture books can play a crucial role in helping both ethnic majority and ethnic minority children to negotiate diversity in productive ways (Morgan, 2009; Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010). The lack of emphasis given to ethnic diversity by the librarians involved in this study is exemplified in the following sections. These describe the librarians' views of Australian children's picture books and their perceptions that a lack of ethnic diversity is of minimal consequence for children.

5.2.2 Who and what is portrayed in Australian children's picture books?

Jen claimed that Australian picture books are in demand (Figure 5.2):

We still see lots of those coming through and we're still buying lots. And some of those [Australian] classics like *Possum Magic* etc we are up to 25th anniversary editions, *Wombat Stew*, *Koala Lou*... (Jen, Hartland).

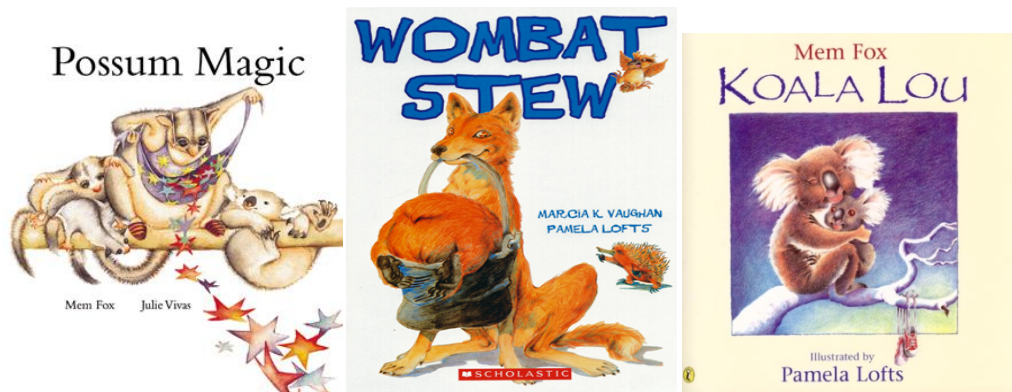


Figure 5.2: *Possum Magic* (Mem Fox); *Wombat Stew* (Marcia Vaughan); *Koala Lou* (Mem Fox)

The librarians explained that Australian picture books often portray ‘everyday life’ in Australia (Figure 5.3):

I think they can portray everyday life. Some of them we have, like the book *Peggy* that was nominated for book week is simply about a chicken that [on] a windy day gets blown away and it has a bit of an adventure in the city then finds its way home.... And I think that that’s where most children can relate to the story (Jen, Somerville).



Figure 5.3: *Peggy* (Anna Walker); *The Terrible Suitcase* (Emma Allen); *With Nan* (Tania Cox)

Jen went on to explain how Australian picture books cover many different settings that are typically found in Australia (Figure 5.3):

...city and country, certainly in some that I’ve seen... I think also you know, going to a party, or going on a picnic or going to the beach, some of those typical Australian settings that we do. Having a quick look through what was nominated this year, *Terrible Suitcase*, every kid’s going to relate to this. It’s her first day of school and she got this horrible suitcase. It’s the whole feeling ‘am I going to fit in?’ *With Nan*, that’s set out in the country and it’s about a boy and his grandma and what they see when they go out on a walk... (Jen, Somerville).

Similarly, Lydia explained that many different themes, issues and settings are covered in Australian picture books:

I think they cover a broad spectrum of themes and issues... it's not so much the outback and native animals as such. I think now a lot of the picture books include cityscapes and country towns, not so much what it used to be... There is a definite swing to try and like to show there's different types of families... [it] gives the kids a broad spectrum (Lydia, Thornbury).

Joyce argued that contemporary Australian picture books portray a diverse range of childhoods and settings (see Figure 5.4):

...it encompasses everything, you've got *Ziba came on a boat*, that's the refugee experience and that's a picture book for three year olds. You've got *Possum Magic* which is a trip around Australia which is for three year olds, you've got *On the Beach* which is a holiday... what about *Woolvs in the Sitee*? That's inner city life for disadvantaged city kids. So all those books are available and they tell about the rest of the world as well (Joyce, Hartland).

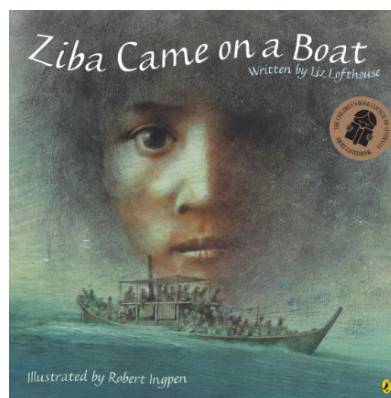


Figure 5.4: *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Liz Lofthouse)

The librarians seemed satisfied that Australian children's picture books represent an appropriate range of everyday Australian activities and settings and that they are increasingly being written to encompass a range of childhood experiences. When asked to reflect more specifically on the inclusion of ethnically diverse characters in Australian children's picture books, each of the librarians was able to cite at least one example. For instance, Joyce explained that she had recently found relevant books for a woman who had adopted two Nigerian children:

The other day I had a question from a lady who had adopted two Nigerian children and we went round and found picture books that had adopted children and black children in it... Allison Lester [Australian author] for instance... her series of books. There're all different colours, shapes and sizes and have different interests, so it's a perfect example of an all-encompassing picture book (Joyce, Hartland).

When Jen was first asked if she could think of any ethnically diverse Australian children's picture books, she commented: 'Nothing particularly stands out, probably if I browse the shelves...'. However, after pondering for a while she was then able to provide an example of an Australian book including characters of Chinese background (Figure 5.5):

So I think there's one *Fang Fang's Chinese New Year* that I often recommend. I think that probably has an Asian background (Jen, Somerville).



Figure 5.5: Fang Fang's Chinese New Year (Sally Rippin)

Lydia gave an account of a book with characters that she described as 'non-Anglo':

There's a great book called *The Kinder Hat*, which is a lovely book which is about a little girl who makes her mum a hat at kindergarten and she makes it out of an ice cream container or something and the mum wears it on the way home and everyone's looking at her because she's wearing this hat. It's a lovely book and I think all the characters in that book are from a non-Anglo background (Lydia, Thornbury).

However, the librarians also mentioned many ethnically diverse books based on characters living in other countries, rather than ethnic diversity *within* Australian communities. This reflects the findings of Metusela (2013) – Australian picture books portraying non-Anglo-Australian characters are often set in overseas locations (see Chapter 1). For instance, when discussing her favourite books, Joyce talked of *The Swirling Hijaab* (Figure 5.6):

There's a wonderful one that comes in several languages called *The Swirling Hijaab* and it's a picture book and it's about a little girl playing with her mother's scarf and it's absolutely beautiful. It's quite well known now (Joyce, Hartland).



Figure 5.6: *The Swirling Hijaab* (Na'ima Robert); *The Librarian of Basra* (Jeanette Winter); *Peeking ducks* (Krista Bell)

When discussing different ethnicities, Joyce continued with another example (Figure 5.6):

There are other brilliant ones like *The Librarian of Basra*, that's a true story. It's about the librarian of Basra who literally went and hid the books so that they could keep them (Joyce, Hartland).

Jen gave an example of a book set in China (Figure 5.6):

I had a look around and there was one called *Peeking ducks* which was just lovely, so it's probably where I think the book explains something that I don't know, so I've learnt [something] (Jen, Somerville).

Joyce was the only librarian who was readily able to identify several authors of ethnically diverse picture books, however, only one of these (Bob Graham) was an Australian author:

Oh yeah, heaps, we've got all those nice middle-class ones like Bob Graham and Shirley Hughes and things like that... And all the black American ones like the Jack Keats (Joyce, Hartland).

The interviews demonstrated that the term 'ethnic diversity' is open to interpretation. When referring to 'ethnically diverse' books, the librarians mainly identified picture books containing 'non-white' characters (often set in overseas locations), rather than books incorporating characters of multiple ethnic backgrounds, side-by-side. Out of the three librarians interviewed, Joyce was the most knowledgeable about books that follow the latter definition. This is likely because Joyce has worked at Hartland Library, located in the most ethnically diverse locality of the three libraries, for over twenty years.

The librarians were also asked whether it is easy to access picture books that portray ethnic diversity. Jen explained that they have become easier to find over time:

Now compared to even ten years ago probably better, but I think it comes down to the writer either having a broad knowledge of that background or being of that multicultural background themselves to give it that authenticity that it needs (Jen, Somerville).

Joyce claimed that although there are many examples of picture books that portray ethnic diversity, important gaps remain:

We don't have very much on South Sea Islands, that's another big group we have... Papua New Guinea doesn't have much either but we don't have many Papua New Guineans here but we do have quite a lot of Islanders [in the community] so that's more my concern at this stage. There's quite a few African ones [books] that we're getting and of course we've got tons from the Middle East so that's not a problem and South East Asia is fine (Joyce, Hartland).

Joyce also noted that Nepalese stories are hard to find. She described being keen to add Nepalese books to the library collection as they are a growing ethnic group in Hartland.

The librarians' observations relating to the availability of picture books that portray ethnic diversity also concurred with the findings of Metusela (2013). These picture books have become more common over time, but certain ethnic groups remain drastically under-represented. As discussed in the following section, the librarians involved in this study did not consider such omissions to be particularly problematic.

5.2.3 How do representations of ethnic diversity in picture books affect children?

The librarians stated that the inclusion (or indeed absence) of ethnic diversity in picture books is of little or no consequence for children. They all argued that children can relate to stories that are similar to their own experiences, regardless of ethnicity. Despite working in multicultural Hartland, Joyce explained that it is more important to portray shared experiences such as 'school' than ethnic diversity:

Well you know *Splat the cat* is about going to school. It doesn't matter where you come from, doesn't matter your ethnic background, going to school is the same experience, whether you're a cat with a pet mouse, or a Chinese girl or a little Anglo boy it's all the same experience (Joyce, Hartland).

When Joyce was asked if children who attend her library notice or mention the absence of ethnic diversity in picture books, she said:

I don't think it would ever occur to them. I mean children don't think that way, especially when they grow up in this area where they're all mixing together anyway (Joyce, Hartland).

Joyce argued that children growing up in a multicultural area do not necessarily need books portraying ethnic diversity.

When Jen was asked how children relate to book characters of different ethnicities she responded:

Actually one of them is... *Mirror*, now *Mirror* is completely pictures, it's pretty well wordless. It conveys a family in urban Sydney on one side and you read it that way on the side, you turn the pages at the same time, it's a family in African Morocco. And there's the family going off shopping, the family in Morocco they've made a woven rug and take it to the markets to sell and low and behold the family in Sydney buy it from a rug shop... It showed two completely different countries but they basically lived the same sort of life, but one was more technologically advanced and what the family in Morocco did with the money they got from the rug, they bought a computer... that's probably the book that's stuck the most... That was by Jeanie Baker (Jen, Somerville).

In this example, as in Joyce's, a colourblind approach was being operationalised. Both Jen and Joyce acknowledged that children can learn about other cultures through books, but ultimately the books would reveal that all children are essentially the same. This is potentially problematic as it hides the everyday experiences of ethnic minorities and can lead to further discrimination (Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Fesperman, 2013). This 'cultural silencing' can, for instance, add pressure for the ethnic minority to assimilate (Freeman, 2005). Although colourblindness has been found to reduce prejudice, Fesperman (2013) asserted that it has proved to be a disservice to ethnic minorities. Furthermore, in contrast to the librarians' perceptions, literature in child development demonstrates that children *do* recognise difference from a young age (as discussed in Chapter 1). One exception to the general colourblind approach adopted by the librarians was a comment made by Jen. She explained that picture books that portray ethnically diverse societies could be a useful tool for reinforcing the message that ethnic diversity is a normal part of society:

I think if it [diversity] is portrayed in books and things it's just a part of life... we have people living here that are from all different countries, it allows you to explain in a better way than perhaps 'Mum why's that child [different]...? (Jen, Somerville).

In this example, Jen alluded to the possibility that ethnic majority children could learn how to negotiate 'real life' multicultural encounters through picture books.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has responded to a main aim of this thesis by outlining the selection processes librarians adopt in relation to picture books. The librarians involved in this study prioritise quality picture books through their collections and in 'Storytime'. The inclusion of ethnically diverse characters is not an explicit part of the librarians' selection criteria. However, the librarians explained that they aim to provide a wide range of picture books, by using several suppliers, having a broad criteria profile, or including their clients' preferences.

This thesis also aims to explore the potential for libraries to do more than provide locations for multicultural encounters between people. As noted in Chapter 2, it seeks to address a gap in the literature by positioning picture books as a way of *experiencing* ethnic diversity within library spaces. The results presented in this chapter suggest that the librarians interviewed in this study have not recognised this potential. For the most part, the librarians presented ethnic diversity as something that is 'separate' from the mainstream collection – as evidenced in the provision of community language books. Ethnically diverse books were described as catering for ethnic minority library patrons, not for the ethnic majority. In addition, the librarians operationalised an understanding of ethnic diversity that was outward looking – they often mentioned books that portray people living in other countries and were less focused on picture books that portray diverse groups living side-by-side in Australia.

The theoretical framework of this thesis aims to extend the notion of everyday multiculturalism to include picture books as 'sites' in which everyday multicultural encounters take place. However, even the librarian who worked in Hartland, the most multicultural locality involved in this study, did not see the need for picture books

portraying an ethnically diverse Australia: ‘especially when they grow up in this area and they are mixing together anyway’ (Joyce). Jen (Somerville) was the only librarian who implied that children’s encounters with ethnic diversity through picture books could shape their ‘real world’ encounters with difference.

Chapter 6 How parents select picture books for children: what's ethnicity got to do with it?

This chapter investigates the priorities that influence the picture book selection process for parents of preschool aged children, including whether and how parents take ethnic diversity into account. The first section explains the main selection criteria adopted by the parents in this study. All parents who were interviewed explained that they place a high value on reading picture books to their children and indicated that much thought goes into the process of selecting suitable picture books. Only two parents indicated that they actively and intentionally select picture books portraying ethnic diversity. When prompted, the majority of participants agreed that picture books portraying ethnic diversity are, to some extent, important. The theoretical framework of this thesis argues that picture books provide a 'space' within which children can experience multicultural encounters. The second section of this chapter thus examines parents' perceptions of how children engage with picture books and their characters as more-than-representations.

6.1 Parents' picture book section criteria

Parents expressed slightly different preferences for their children's picture books, however, they all indicated that they value interesting stories, clear images and 'age-appropriate' contents. 'Age-appropriate' covers many aspects of picture books including length, themes, illustrations, language and format. For Charlotte, short books are needed or her boys would quickly lose concentration:

[T]he boys are really, really young, there's no point in a book with loads and loads of words in it and not many pictures... reading for them is often a couple of minutes at a time... so big wordy things don't really work at the moment (Charlotte).

For Marissa, short bedtime stories are chosen to avoid exhausting her daughter:

I'd have a flick to see how many words are in it because at bedtime... we've kind of got some rules around how long we're going to take, I'm not going to

sit there for three hours with her completely exhausted and not falling asleep (Marissa).

Conversely, Jacinta and Kai's son, is often read lengthy picture books at bedtime. Jacinta explained that he can immerse himself in a story, staring at the illustrations long after the parents have finished reading a page. Kai attributed this to his son's love of fantasy tales but was also aware that it is a strategy for staying up late.

Parents explained that they aim to ensure that the picture books they select for their children have appropriate themes. Marian indicated that she checks picture books thoroughly before bringing them home to ensure her children are not exposed to 'something they don't necessarily need to know as a small child'. Parents commonly filter out themes of fashion, body image and violence:

[O]ne of the ponies being the best dressed pony in Ponyville and always having the latest fashion... I think that's probably not something a three year old needs to know about (Marian).

Vanessa objects to books with images of girls that look like Barbies or Bratz dolls because they portray problematic body image 'norms'. Louise also expressed an aversion to fashion dolls: 'I probably wouldn't be getting her involved in these drama queens'. Interestingly, Disney princesses are exempt from Louise's rule as there is a 'moral' behind the story. Conversely, Marian recently bought her daughter a picture book about a young girl who is confident about being things *other* than a princess to counter the princess 'obsession' (Figure 6.1):

I picked this one up specifically for my daughter for her birthday, because...it was talking about giving little girls real heroes rather than just princesses (Marian).

Marian described the potential for picture books to create encounters with 'heroes' for her daughter, so she intentionally selects picture books that have appropriate, character-building heroes.

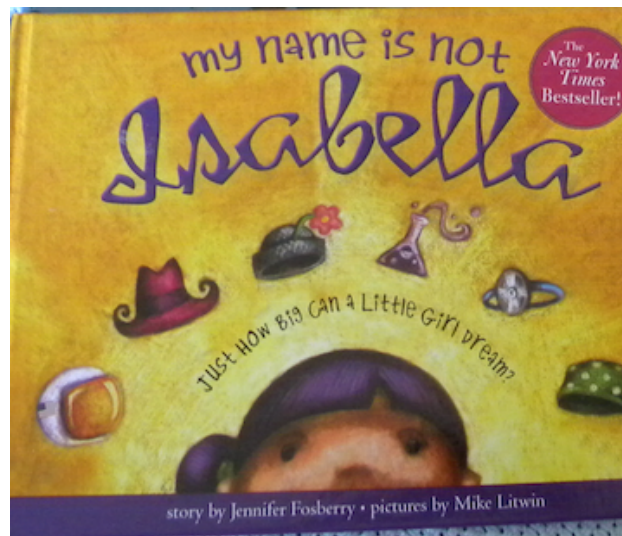


Figure 6.1: *My name is not Isabella* (Jennifer Fosberry)

Sarah and Marissa, also avoid ‘branded’ or ‘commercial’ picture books due to their bad story quality:

The Disney-type ones drive me nuts... or else the ones related to television movies... they just don’t give enough detail and they’re badly, badly written (Sarah).

[T]he ones I don’t like probably tend to be a bit more commercial and I think the writing style is fairly ordinary... (Marissa).

Despite parents’ obvious distaste for these books they often come into the home as gifts from other people. In interviews, parents made it clear that they disapprove of these books, but their children enjoy them. Charlotte’s son ‘loves’ the ‘Bob the builder’ books that she thinks are ‘pretty rubbishy’ and Marissa’s daughter ‘loves’ the fairy books that she finds ‘superficial’.

Parents also reported filtering anything considered violent, scary or aggressive:

It was a bit too tit for tat, it was a bit you know, the bullies are beating up on the family, so suddenly this baby grows up and starts beating up the bullies, which was all a bit rough (Charlotte).

As with librarians (Chapter 5), parents prioritise appropriate word length and good pictures. They expressed a clear preference for stories that have simple themes such as those based around children’s day-to-day experiences. Vanessa explained that an ideal picture book involves ordinary experiences such as going to school, ‘things that she

can really imagine herself doing or things that you want to show her, things that she'll be doing'. However, parents include more of their own personal taste in selecting picture books than the librarians. Parents often choose books that they remember enjoying during their own childhood or particular themes that they like, such as 'Australiana'. Parents are also more 'picky' and double-check whether a book has themes that are suitable for their children. As with the librarians, ethnic diversity was not described as a key priority by the parents interviewed. This will be explored in the next section.

6.2 Does ethnic diversity shape parents' picture book selection?

As explained in Chapter 3, the significance of ethnic diversity within this study was initially concealed from participants, in order to determine whether they would identify this as a significant issue without being prompted. Participating in the study were six non-Anglo-Australian parents (two of them a married couple) and six Anglo-Australian parents (Table 3.2). When prompted, most parents indicated that ethnic diversity *should* be a criterion when selecting picture books, despite not identifying it independently. Four out of twelve participants (three Anglo-Australian parents and one Malaysian-Chinese/Fiji Indian couple) stated that ethnic diversity played little or no part when they selected picture books. Ethnic diversity was important to four non-Anglo-Australian participants, three of whom mentioned (without prompting) that their own cultural/linguistic heritage is important in their selection of picture books. However, only one of the participants, Peter, raised the topic of ethnic diversity before the interview questions turned to that theme. Peter was also the only non-Anglo-Australian parent who reported actively searching for picture books portraying ethnically diverse characters. Similarly, Vanessa was the only Anglo-Australian participant who reported actively seeking out picture books depicting a diverse range of ethnic characters, without being prompted. Table 6.1 shows which participants mentioned their own ethnicity, or other ethnicities as important criteria for picture books and whether they did so before or after being asked by the interviewer. None of the Anglo-Australian parents mentioned their own ethnicity without being prompted.

Table 6.1 Ethnicity discussed before or after prompting

Name	Ethnicity	Mentioned own ethnicity		Mentioned ethnic diversity (within society)		Mentioned ethnic diversity (globally)	
		<i>Independently</i>	<i>After prompting</i>	<i>Independently</i>	<i>After prompting</i>	<i>Independently</i>	<i>After prompting</i>
Andrea	Greek	X			X		X
Lee	Chinese	X			X		X
Peter	African	X		X		-	-
Charlotte	Anglo/Chinese/Islander		X		X		X
Jacinta & Kai	Fiji Indian & Malaysian Chinese		X	-	-	-	-
Vanessa	Anglo-Australian		X	X		X	
Louise	Anglo-Australian		X		X	X	
Stella	Anglo-Australian		X	X			X
Marissa	Anglo-Australian		X	X		X	
Sarah	Anglo-Australian		X	-	-	-	-
Marian	Anglo-Australian		X		X		X

When mentioning ethnic diversity in Australian picture books, parents' responses fell into two categories – described in Table 6.1 as 'mentioned ethnic diversity within society' and 'mentioned ethnic diversity globally'. The first category refers to parents who prioritised books portraying an ethnically diverse Australian society. Others, similarly to the librarians, focused on books portraying diverse cultures in overseas settings and, in some cases, non-English language books. In the following section, each parent is discussed in relation to these categories in order to better understand what ethnic diversity *means* to them and how this influences the picture books they select for their child/ren.

6.2.1 Ethnic diversity within Australian society

The following parents want Australian picture books to more realistically portray ethnic diversity *within* Australian society. These parents noted that such books would be ideal, but are often difficult to find.

Charlotte

Charlotte grew up in Australia with an Anglo-Australian mother. On her father's side she has a multi-ethnic background (her paternal grandparents being Chinese and Polynesian). Charlotte indicated that she would be interested in learning more about her cultural heritage, with her children, when they were older:

I don't really know much about it myself...it's something I have given some thought to... So maybe when they [her sons] are a bit older I would think about it as an opportunity to go and learn with them, whether that be through books or be through travel...

Despite feeling detached from her cultural heritage, Charlotte wants to access books portraying ethnic diversity:

I would love to be able to choose more books that had [a] wider... range of ethnicity and characters... Books are a way of relating what children come across in real life and I feel like by limiting it [diversity] in books, you only ever see less than half of humanity...

Charlotte wants books that do not focus on ethnic differences, but which promote a diverse society living together:

... that doesn't focus on Indigenous people in the bush and... repeat the message that people live in a specific way because they are of a particular ethnicity... that same message gets repeated over and over again which then reinforces the difference rather than the... building of that relationship.

Charlotte argued that books can provide opportunities for discussing ethnic diversity and promoting tolerance among children. However, in keeping with the findings of Metusela (2013), she lamented that most books do not portray ethnic diversity in useful ways. In addition, she noted that many books incorporating diverse characters are not age-appropriate for her children:

[A]t the library... there are quite a few books down there that are interesting from an ethnicity point of view that are really specific... like the *Littlest Refugee*... it's a bit old narrative wise... so I guess for me at the moment it's more about the really visual thing of not every character in a book looking the same so he starts to recognise that there is a variety in the way that people appear...

Charlotte identified *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes* as an example of a picture book in which the characters' diversity is portrayed using a visual approach, rather than a complicated storyline (Figure 6.2).

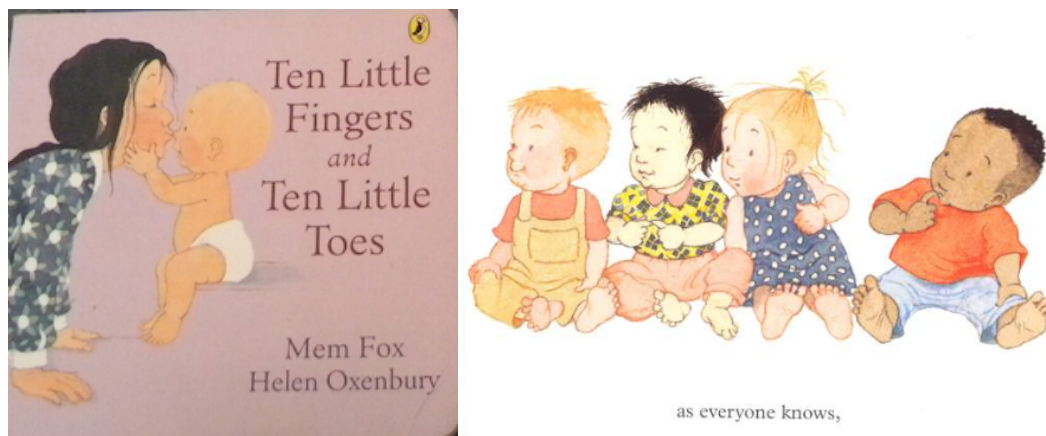


Figure 6.2: Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes (Mem Fox)

Peter

Peter grew up in Tanzania. He is in an inter-ethnic relationship and has a multi-ethnic child. Peter is the only non-Anglo-Australian parent interviewed who actively searches for picture books portraying ethnic diversity:

[T]he reason I want her to read such books that have diversity...[is] to be aware that we do tend to look different but...we do play together and we live together and we go to school, we're all still Australians.

He particularly focuses on selecting books with characters that look like his daughter or reflect their family:

I can be biased at times...if I see a book that has a family made of people from different backgrounds then I would...purposely go for that one in particular.

However, Peter indicated that it is difficult to find books portraying multi-ethnic families:

They can go to the same school and work together...or have a barbeque together but they don't get married, they don't intermarry....

This mirrors the findings of Metusela (2013), outlined in Chapter 1. Peter explained that appropriate language and images are crucial when selecting ethnically diverse picture books:

I avoid books that...don't necessarily fit with our values for instance, you know, diversity... [and] the language... if it's not appropriate then I'm not going to encourage that book... [I like to] be sure that there's nothing in there that's gonna be a bit demeaning language or something.

Ethnic diversity is at the forefront of Peter's book selection process. He would like to see more ethnic diversity in Australian picture books:

I would prefer to buy or get books from the library that have... diverse ethnicity... To me that's the true representations of our society today and... I would have liked my daughter to get familiar with this society, this is how we are.

Peter also wants to pass on his culture and a sense of openness to his daughter:

I come from a background where we value dignity, respect for all and that sort of stuff, so we see everyone as equal... I want her to learn my culture...

Peter argued that these objectives can be supported 'through picture books'. He thus purposefully selects books that will enable his daughter to encounter her own cultural background and to see an ethnically diverse society.

Stella

Stella is an Anglo-Australian woman who is married to an Italian man. She grew up in an ethnically diverse area, but now lives in a predominantly white suburb. Stella explained that books can play an important role in providing multicultural encounters which she considers 'missing' from her children's everyday lives. One of her favourite picture books is Mem Fox's *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes*:

[I]t's showing Australian society, that there are other children out there... it's showing that there's all sorts of babies and doing different things too. I actually really love this one... my husband and I we're used to a kind of diverse culture but our kids aren't because there's not a lot of diversity down here.

Stella explained that she would prefer more representations of diverse ethnicities in picture books - for instance, picture books portraying Muslim women so that her children would not be scared of difference:

Especially the different religious backgrounds like Muslims that wear... the veils and things, it would be good to have them in picture books so kids are seeing them.

Stella wants her children to accept ethnic diversity in the society around them and to see this as a normal part of life. For Stella, picture books have an important role to play for her ethnic majority children who are not exposed to ethnic diversity in their neighbourhood.

Vanessa

Vanessa is of Scottish ancestry but lived in different countries during her childhood. She is interested in and aware of, different cultures, therefore places a 'multicultural dimension' high on her selection criteria for picture books, especially since her local neighbourhood has low ethnic diversity:

Well I do try and look for...some diversity, because where we live everything is so homogenous and I don't know how she's going to learn about other cultures. I'm trying to do it through books, it's not easy.

Vanessa also sees the potential of picture books as sites of multicultural encounters for her ethnic majority daughter.

Andrea

Andrea is of Greek heritage and her husband is British. She has a preference for Australian bushland and animal stories, for interactive books and Greek-language books. She has found Greek-language books difficult to purchase and has to rely on the library. Andrea also mentioned that she would like to have books that portray an ethnically diverse society. Such books would provide a more accurate portrayal of the area where her family lives and would teach her child about cultural differences - and to avoid judging by appearances:

[W]e live in Sydney which is one of the most diverse cities in Australia but also I'd like her to have an understanding of different cultures and not be... afraid of different cultures and different people, just because of appearance.

If given the option, Andrea indicated she would prioritise a book portraying ethnic diversity: 'I'd definitely pick the one with diverse cultures'. Andrea is open with her child about cultural diversity in their everyday lives, such as going to Asian markets, or eating Greek food made by the child's grandmother. As Andrea's child is only one year old, she is 'looking forward to finding books that do demonstrate... diversity' when the time is right.

Marian

Marian has an Anglo-Australian background and stated a preference for Australian authors like Mem Fox and Pamela Allen. Like Andrea, she values picture books with animals. Ethnic diversity is not a main priority when selecting picture books. Nonetheless, Marian drew specific attention to the book *Ten Little Fingers and Ten*

Little Toes which she likes because of the ‘difference’ between all the babies. When prompted, Marian stated that picture books should accurately reflect society:

[I]n the society we live in we’ve got a mixture of ethnicities and I think it’s good for the kids to be familiar with that in their picture books and stuff. So we have got some that [are] like that.

Although Marian does not actively seek out ethnic diversity in picture books, she acknowledged the importance of her children seeing it represented in their books.

These parents identified the potential for picture books to provide realistic insights into the diversity of everyday life in Australia, however, they made it clear that such books can be difficult to find. This issue is discussed in greater detail in the second half of this chapter, which links parents’ perceptions to the theoretical framework of this thesis, specifically around ideas of everyday multiculturalism.

6.2.2 Diversity in the world

Some parents want picture books to portray diverse cultures in the wider world. They explained that they want to broaden their children’s perspectives of the world through picture books.

Marissa

Marissa is an Anglo-Australian mother of one who grew up in an area of low ethnic diversity. She is currently living in a predominantly white suburb. Marissa explained that her love of travelling opened her up to new cultures and experiences which she found interesting. These experiences caused Marissa to reflect upon her monocultural background and upbringing:

At the time it didn’t seem anything unusual, that was the world... that you’re aware of, but... then travelling and realising more about the world makes you more aware I think.

One of Marissa’s favourite books is *There’s a train going by my window* because the characters travel around the world (Figure 6.3):

I also like the fact that that they go to lots of different places, so we [she and her daughter] can talk about lots of different parts of the world and start to understand that it’s not just where we live it’s a big wide world out there.

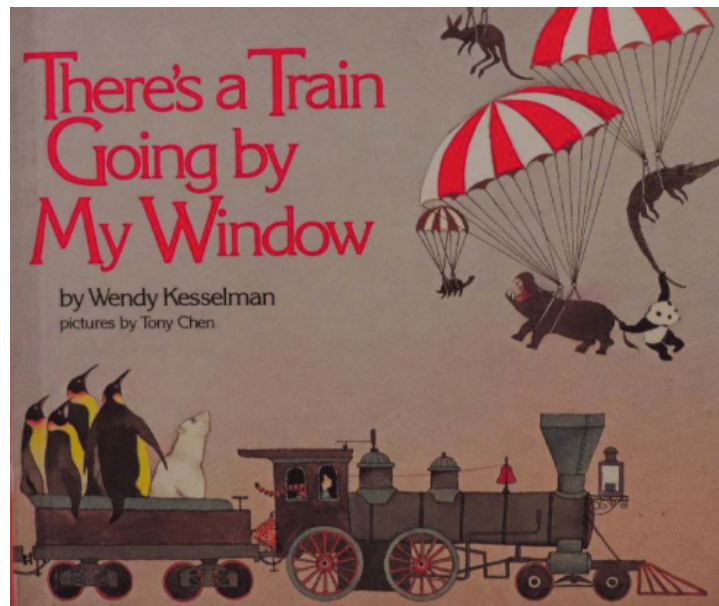


Figure 6.3: There's a Train Going by My Window (Wendy Kesselan)

For Marissa, books provide an opportunity to expose her child to global diversity:

When I'm looking for books, I'm interested in... something that does have some cultural diversity to show...the world's full of lots of different people and there's lots of different places and you know it's not just where we are and where we live.

Marissa explained that her daughter can be exposed to diverse places and people through books and hoped that this would foster tolerance:

I'd like her from the outset to know that wherever you go in the world there's going to be lots of different kinds of people, people dress differently, you know different things are acceptable to different cultures, obviously you can't tell a three year old that but sometimes through a book they can pick up on the concept that things are different in different parts of the world.

Marissa also mentioned *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes*:

It's probably not so much about the people, more... the places for me... her seeing the different places people might live.

Marissa prioritised books depicting a diversity of *places* rather than characters.

Louise

Louise grew up in a British family in Australia. She described her parents as having an 'open house' and diversity was part of her childhood, including her adopted sibling who is Filipino:

So I guess maybe that has shaped my culture and the way I'll bring my daughter up and possibly why I would choose not to have Australian books but rather have books from other cultures. Or maybe I would like to find an Australian book that shows all cultures in it, because that's true.

However, Louise indicated that she does not actively seek out picture books that portray diversity in an Australian context. Instead, Louise prioritises picture books that she or her husband liked as a child, along with books on specific cultures that she is interested in. For example, she has started a collection of Spanish-language books for her daughter and her 'absolute favourite book' is *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, based on a true story of a Japanese girl, which she hopes her daughter will one day love. Louise intends to continue filling her daughter's bookshelves with books on other cultures as she believes that her daughter already experiences Australian culture by living here. Her aim is to use these books to give her daughter a broader worldview.

Vanessa

As well as seeing the importance of picture books to portray an ethnically diverse society, (section 6.2.1) Vanessa also wants to expose her child to cultures in overseas locations:

I suppose to motivate her to go and visit these places and so that when she's doing things she has a broader perspective and she can do things a little more interesting or different.

Vanessa, like Louise, aims to use picture books to give her daughter a broader worldview.

Lee

Lee is a first-generation migrant from China, with two preschool aged children, a girl and a boy. Lee considers picture books to be very important for her children's growth and development. She explained that her focus is providing appropriate picture books for the different stages of her children's growth and incorporating relevant themes and situations to help teach her children about themselves and the world around them: 'they learn good habits, manners from books and they can increase their vocabulary....'

Lee provides both Chinese and English-language picture books for her children. Chinese picture books help her children to understand their cultural heritage and to develop language skills. However, picture books in English are equally important as her children are growing up in Australia:

[W]e come from China we really want them to keep this culture and the mother language better so they can read and one day they can write, it's good for their life...But now we live in Australia and they go to school, the normal life, so we have to read in English... I think it's good [to have] both as long as they [the books] are good enough and the children like them I just buy them.

Lee focuses on providing picture books with diverse scenes from around the world. She specifically mentioned *Piggy Wiggy* (about a pig who travels the world) and *Martine* (a series set in Belgium which follows a little girl's everyday life). Lee purchased *Martine* to prepare her daughter for going to school (Figure 6.4).

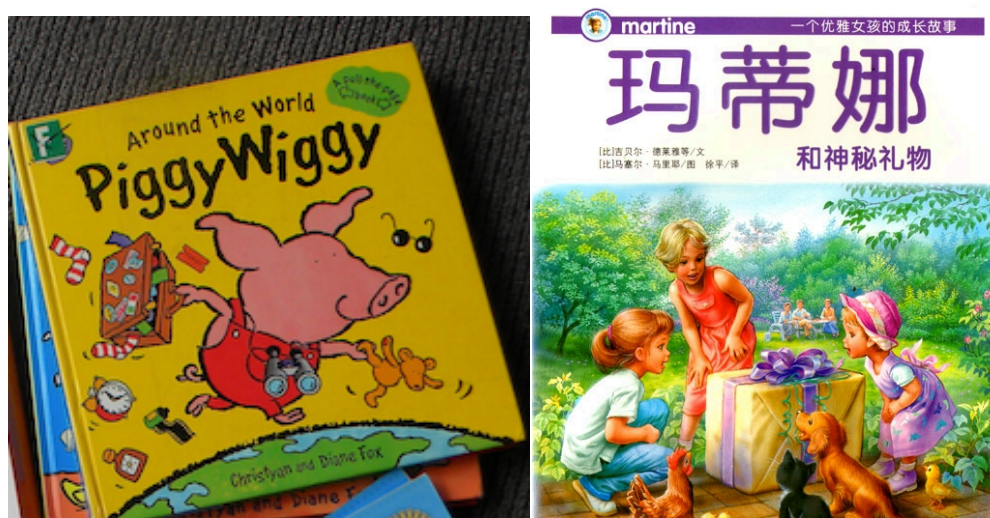


Figure 6.4: *Around the World Piggy Wiggy* (Diane Fox); *Martine* (Gilbert Delahaye)

These parents explained that they select picture books to portray diverse cultures of the world. They prefer picture books portraying places overseas because they show a broader world perspective to their children.

6.2.3 No preference for ethnic diversity in picture books

Sarah, Jacinta and Kai did not express any real preference for ethnic diversity in children's picture books, even when prompted.

Sarah

Sarah is of British ancestry. She indicated that books are important and that she prioritises well-written stories above all other qualities. Sarah does not prioritise ethnic diversity when selecting picture books for her children. When prompted, Sarah reflected on the diversity portrayed in her older son's home reader books, provided by his school. She appreciates that the books:

...don't make big deal about it, it's sort of in terms of encouraging the students to recognise there are other ethnicities and levels of ability as well.

Sarah does not independently select books portraying ethnic diversity.

Jacinta and Kai

Kai and his partner Jacinta were interviewed together. Kai is from Malaysia and his parents strongly reinforced the educational importance of books during his childhood. For Kai, an ideal picture book has multiple concepts, such as a book on shapes that could also incorporate size and colour. Jacinta stated that they are not adventurous when selecting picture books and have a bias towards the familiar 'classics', such as well-known fairy tales. Ethnic diversity is not a priority for Kai or Jacinta. Although Jacinta's background is Fiji-Indian, she has distanced herself from her own culture due to conflicting religious beliefs and avoids providing her child with books in which spiritual messages are woven into the storyline:

[I]t's very different from here, [Indian] tales are based on their belief... [Indian tales] have more influence of religion in their stories so... we kept ourselves away from that...

Jacinta argued that her child experiences enough insight relating to his cultural background when spending time with his grandparents and thus he does not need picture books to perform this function.

Jacinta and Kai have borrowed or bought books about other cultures, but the ethnicity of characters is not a focus. Kai explained that he never notices picture books with ethnic diversity and has never thought to look for them. However, Jacinta explained that they are happy that their son is friends with children from other ethnic backgrounds in school. After prompting, both Kai and Jacinta agreed that books that

portray friendship and interaction would be beneficial for their son to ‘accept them for who they are’ (Jacinta) rather than ‘hate people because they’re different’ (Kai).

6.3 Do picture books provide opportunities for everyday multicultural encounters?

This section explores the potential for picture books to expose children to everyday multicultural encounters. It builds upon the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis (discussed in Chapter 2) by exploring parents’ perceptions of multiculturalism in Australian children’s picture books in general and also their observations that specific ethnic groups are under-represented. As noted earlier in this chapter, many parents indicated that multicultural Australian picture books are in short supply. The section also explores parents’ perceptions of how children *engage* with picture books and relate to and interact with their characters. By pairing these perspectives with understandings of children’s cognitive development (Bergen, 2002), the remainder of this chapter builds a case that picture books provide an important mechanism for children’s everyday multicultural encounters. Crucially, everyday multiculturalism is not just something that children can witness occurring in the pages of picture books – it is something that they can personally experience as the characters come *out* of the books and into their everyday (imaginary) lives.

6.3.1 Do Australian picture books portray a multicultural society?

Parents expressed a variety of perspectives on how picture books represent Australian society and culture. Louise admitted not owning many Australian picture books but reflected that most focus on national symbols such as native wildlife. She considers this problematic because:

[T]he Australian books... are focusing a lot on what people overseas would see Australia as, not like what it actually is, like how many different races and cultures and people are here (Louise).

Charlotte explained that Australian picture books tend to emphasise country settings, or suburban detached houses rather than cities:

I think they present a pretty idealised picture of a fairly countrified, almost rural existence... the really simple Australian picture books kind of focus on this non-urban experience a lot and it’s really, really noticeable (Charlotte).

Similarly, Peter noted that Australian picture books often portray outdoor activities that reflect an idealised Australian lifestyle:

...Australian books are more about playing outdoors, going outdoors on your bicycle or at the beach with your family, picnics, it's the normal, it's the lifestyle here (Peter).

Another common observation was that Australian society in picture books is usually comprised of middle-income nuclear ('perfect') families:

[T]he families in the books seem to be mother, father, brother, sister like that... I haven't really noticed any books having step-sisters and step-brothers and that kind of thing (Louise).

According to most parents, levels of ethnic diversity portrayed in Australian picture books range from 'very poor' to 'ok'. Some parents were able to identify specific books that portray the diverse reality of Australian society, but noted that considerable effort is often involved in locating such books. Marissa had not specifically searched for such books, but expected that they would be harder to find:

I would expect one [in ten books would contain ethnic diversity]... so I guess that would say, well if I was deliberately looking for a book it would be harder than finding a book that didn't have much cultural diversity (Marissa).

Several parents identified Mem Fox as a specific author who regularly portrays a diverse Australia. One book in particular, *Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes* was mentioned repeatedly by parents. Vanessa also mentioned *Wombat Divine* by Mem Fox, where 'everyone's got a role to play... she's saying everyone's got a role, there's a place for everyone in her stories'.

Some parents, having few ethnically diverse Australian picture books in their own collection, acknowledged the local library as a potential source of such books. Parents spent more time discussing the types of books that they would ideally *like* to expose their children to, rather than the types of books that they already have. Their observations fit with evidence from Metusela (2013) that ethnically diverse Australian picture books are scarce.

6.3.2 Which ethnic groups are under-represented in Australian picture books?

The parents indicated that many ethnic groups present in Australian society are under-represented in (or absent from) picture books. Asian characters and specific religious groups (especially Muslim Australians) were mentioned:

I think South East Asian people are... under-represented... I don't think African characters are particularly under-represented because they're often kind of used to show the 'other'... but I think particularly in the big cities in Australia, Sydney and Melbourne given [the large] South East Asian populations you would hope to see... more characters from that kind of background (Charlotte).

Probably Muslim... we don't see many characters like that in children's picture books. That's probably the main one... (Andrea).

Marissa noted a general under-representation of all non-Anglo-Australian ethnicities within Australian picture books:

Australian books probably do portray your very blond or ginger haired Caucasian child probably more so than other cultures probably just across the board, I wouldn't say I've noticed one particular culture missing... (Marissa).

Peter made a similar observation:

Australia is quite diverse, it's huge and it's got everything, people of different cultures, people who have different lifestyles... I don't think you get much sense of the true Australian society [in picture books].

Charlotte indicated that Indigenous Australians are regularly mis-represented as living in the 'outback'. She commented that 'an Indigenous urban book could be a fantastic idea'. This perception of the mis-representation of Indigenous Australia is supported by the evidence presented in Metusela (2013).

Several parents concluded that Australian picture books seem to value Anglo-Australian perspectives and thinking above others. Some expressed concern that books perpetuate old-fashioned ideas of ethnic diversity and that there might be an underlying message of 'norms' in Australian society:

[S]ome of them are probably old and may reflect old attitudes towards cultural diversity. That's a problem in itself... I think it still says we're very much a Caucasian [society]... I guess maybe that people still see cultural diversity as minority groups and therefore the majority looks like this or whatever, so

that's the way we're going to portray the images in the books... I think some of the newer books are more reflective of the broad spectrum of people that we see in society but I think maybe they're still thinking we're writing for the majority (Marissa).

Peter also expressed concern about the 'norms' portrayed in picture books:

Based on what I've noticed... they do suggest that a particular background... is the most valuable background. It's got proper manners, preferable ways of living... valued members of this society should have a house, a big house with children, be married, so there's mum and dad in the family and they can afford going on holidays and they can afford toys and this and that, that's the ideal Australian (Peter).

The following section explores parents' perceptions of how these portrayals may impact on children and their understandings of the ways in which children engage with characters from picture books as 'more-than-representations'.

6.3.3 Young children's encounters with picture book characters: who do they relate to?

Many of the parents claimed that their children do not notice, or at least do not respond to, people's different appearances - whether in books or in real life. This was regularly identified as a virtue, an interesting trend given widespread criticisms of colourblind approaches to multiculturalism in literature on children's development (Freeman, 2005; Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2012):

I would hope that they wouldn't see a difference and that they just see the character as a child or an adult as a farmer or whatever as a ballerina... but I suppose there would come a time and age where they would recognise that difference and then for me I suppose it would be exposing her to lots of difference... in the picture books... but also in our everyday activities... [so] she doesn't see it as anything (Andrea).

During reading time, Vanessa's daughter often chooses a character to 'be' for the day. She regularly chooses a girl of a different ethnic background to her own, because she likes her accessories (Figure 6.5):

[S]o I ask my daughter who do you want to be today and she will pick Sushma because 'I like her ribbons or I like her skirt'. She doesn't see the ethnicity she just sees the trimmings (Vanessa).



Figure 6.5: *Starting School* (Janet and Allan Ahlberg)

Marissa argued that her child does not explicitly respond to ethnic differences in books, despite noticing other differences such as hair colour:

I can't say that she's ever noticed differences amongst people and she's never said to me 'Why's that person look a particular way?' ever... I've thought if we're somewhere and we've seen someone who is, say a newly arrived African migrant that is very tall, dresses quite differently and very dark skin, she'd ask me a question but I don't know if it's an age thing, but she just seems to take people for what they are... She'll talk about some differences, for example she's got a cousin with red hair, so one of her dolls has got red hair [she] is the cousin and then I'm the one with dark hair because I've got dark hair... so she does notice that people do look different (Marissa).

Marissa conceded that it is easier for her child to relate to or engage with characters that look like her:

[M]y daughter does relate more to little characters that she thinks look like her... [but] if she likes the story, if she likes the situation and wants to immerse herself with them I think she could still relate to that particular character (Marissa).

Charlotte expressed some concern that books portraying only white characters could potentially make ethnic minority children feel 'othered'. But, on the other hand, she also noted that her own children are able to relate to characters that do not look like them. She explained that her older son relates to characters based on the activities they are portrayed doing: 'He relates to the character and what they're doing rather than visually what they look like' (Charlotte).

Vanessa expressed concern that it would be difficult being an ethnic minority child who cannot 'see themselves' in picture books:

It must be very difficult, you would always be on the outside. Oh I think it must be terrible. You'd just be so detached...you're never represented always

on the outside, invisible... They'd think there's no place for them, 'where do I fit? Nobody's interested in me'... the fact they never see themselves must make a difference (Vanessa).

Marian theorised that it would be harder for non-Anglo-Australian children to relate to Anglo-Australian characters:

I could imagine that would be harder... I can imagine if I had a child of an ethnic minority [background] I would find some books that had similar looking children to them. I think I would probably be more aware of it... (Marian).

Louise was less concerned – she argued that non-Anglo-Australian children would be able to relate to Anglo-Australian characters, as they live here and are a part of Australian culture. She considers it normal for there to be more picture books about the ethnic majority:

I guess when you live in a country...[where] most people are white, so when the books have white people in them, you think I guess that's the country we live in. I guess you'd feel a bit annoyed that there's no books about you and your culture because it's here... it's not ideal, but I guess you would expect it (Louise).

According to Peter, his daughter relates to characters in picture books as a four year old child and thus has a distinct perspective to his own:

I think there are a few ways they can relate to the books. First of all is that they're children, so they don't tend to... notice all the other differences that we adults notice in these books. They might just see these books are books for children... I doubt she sees all the things that I see when I read these books... But in the future when she's 10 or 12... she might have a different view of the books (Peter).

Vanessa also argued that adults are more primed to notice difference:

If the white children don't see [difference]... the children from different ethnic groups might not notice they're not in the books, because they don't see skin colour... it could just be an adult thing (Vanessa).

Similarly, Sarah argued that children just accept others, even when they look different:

I think they just accept them, they don't... particularly say that's different from that, I think they just accept that everyone's in the right place... (Sarah).

Several parents expressed a strong belief that their children do not notice ethnic difference. However, researchers have proven that children notice differences such as skin colour from the age of three (Cole and Valentine, 2010).

6.3.4 Children's encounters with picture book characters: more-than-representations?

Picture books are often taken to be representations (or mis-representations) of societies. However, for young children, these representations can become realities. Children often pretend to be, or to play with, characters from their books and also invent stories based upon what they have seen (Bergen, 2002). In their daily lives, children *interact* with characters and these characters, in turn, can be identified as having more-than-representational significance in their lives. As Wilson (2011), Carr *et al.*, (1993) and Valentine (2008) have noted, multicultural encounters can take place and temporary bonds can be created in everyday situations with 'strangers'. In the case of this thesis, this argument is extended to make a case that children can create such temporary bonds through pretend play with the characters in picture books. These interactions range from talking about characters as if they were real, talking to characters, to pretending to be characters or to be in particular scenarios.

All of the parents involved in this study with children aged three or above reported having observed some form of pretend play. For some children, pretend play is a daily occurrence involving their favourite picture book characters:

It's only recently... probably the last two or three months that he's started running around and acting as the characters in books... He's started playing out a scene out of a book and... reciting the lines of the book ... (Charlotte).

Peter explained that his daughter talks to and pretends to be her favourite book characters. Despite the fact that his daughter is of mixed ethnicity (African-white), in the case of *Charlie and Lola*, she chooses to be the main character Lola, who is white with blonde hair instead of her best friend Lotta, who is dark skinned with dark curly hair (Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.6: Lotta and Lola

Lee explained how her daughter (of Chinese ethnicity) relates well to Martine, a Belgian character. Her daughter likes to imitate Martine in her own life by cooking, painting and being kind to her brother (Figure 6.7):

Every time after reading about Martine she's thinking about cooking, she starts to [draw] and she's trying to be nice to her brother because Martine has a brother as well (Lee).



Figure 6.7: Martine with her family and friends

Lee explained that she actively fosters this type of engagement with picture books and their characters and encourages activities relating to the picture books they read:

And with these books we not only read to them after reading sometimes we play. With this one, the picnic and maybe this one with cooking, after reading we ask them what do you want to cook? And we prepare some simple stuff for them to [do] like butter the bread and place the eggs... we try to find the connection... to extend the book... through a firsthand experience (Lee).

Marissa's daughter draws inspiration for her pretend play from a range of sources:

[S]he definitely does a lot of play, quiet play, where I can hear her talking... It's hard to know at this age...where it's coming from, she doesn't watch a lot of television but she's got a few favourite things that she likes to watch so...she'll be in characters with her little Peppa Pig figurines. [She'll talk] to them... They might be things we've done with her, or they might be things

she's read or they might be things that she's seen on TV... It's a bit of every influence I think (Marissa).

Jacinta and Kai also noted that their son's pretend play likely comes from various sources. For a long time he loved to re-enact the story of David and Goliath with his father. Now he makes swords and plays with them but his parents are unsure exactly what he is re-enacting and whether it is something he has watched or read.

Most parents noted that pretend play is an important part of their children's daily activities. This often involves characters or other sources of inspiration from picture books. However the extent to which picture books influence pretend play and the implications of this for children from a range of ethnic backgrounds, requires further research involving children themselves and observation of their play. This was beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the data presented throughout this chapter point toward possibilities for children to engage with characters from picture books who are of distinct ethnic backgrounds to their own – and thus the potential for picture books to foster (imaginary) multicultural encounters in children's everyday lives. Some parents (Stella and Vanessa) explained that they intentionally select ethnically diverse books to compensate for their ethnic majority children living in low diversity neighbourhoods. They clearly acknowledged that books can do important multicultural work. The potential for picture books as sites of multicultural encounters requires further exploration, but the findings reported in this chapter suggest that the significance of ethnic diversity in children's picture books is much more-than-representational.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter outlined how parents select picture books for their children. Parents in this study reported making careful decisions about the types of books they expose their children to. Similarly to librarians (Chapter 5), parents prefer picture books with good stories, illustrations and format. They also expressed a preference for 'age appropriate' lengths and themes. For many participants, ethnic diversity is not a key priority – exemplified by the fact that many did not raise this issue before specific interview questions prompted them to do so. However, a number of the Anglo-Australian parents noted that picture books can teach their children that Australian

society is ethnically diverse. Alternatively, picture books can teach their children that the world is full of different cultures and landscapes. Most non-Anglo-Australian parents explained that they value picture books that portray their own cultural heritage or language, as well as books that portray realistic representations of Australian society. However, some parents indicated that they give little thought to how ethnicity is portrayed in picture books and there were only two participants who described actively searching for picture books portraying a multicultural Australia. Parents' own ethnicity, background, upbringing and present circumstances all factored into their decision-making processes, but not in predictable ways. Several parents displayed colourblindness to a certain extent and were confident that their children do not recognise difference. These observations conflict with research that demonstrates children do begin to notice ethnic differences from the age of three (Cole and Valentine, 2000) and that colourblind approaches to diversity can foster discrimination and that cultural silencing can act as a disservice to non-Anglo children (Freeman, 2005; Apfelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Fesperman, 2013).

This chapter also explored the potential for picture books to function as sites for children's everyday multicultural encounters, by investigating the contents of picture books and children's interactions with the characters. Parents explained that Australian picture books often reflect Anglo-centric, middle-class Australian 'norms'. Most described difficulties finding books portraying the diverse reality of life in urban Australia. Although everyday multicultural encounters appear to be rare on the pages of Australian picture books, this chapter explored possibilities for other types of multicultural encounters, by exploring ways in which children relate to and interact with characters and storylines beyond the pages of their books – through pretend play. Parents generally agreed that it is easier for children to relate to characters similar to themselves, but many identified instances where their own children have pretended to be (or to play with) characters who look nothing like them. Children often play with or pretend to be their favourite characters, regardless of their own or the characters' ethnicities. Most parents explained that their children pretend to be central characters in the stories, rather than peripheral ones. This highlights a potential problem in Australian children's picture books – as Metusela (2013) revealed that non-Anglo-Australian characters usually occupy peripheral roles. Parents' observations of their children's pretend play, together with literature on children's cognitive development,

draw attention to the extent to which picture book characters are more-than-representations in young children's lives. Thus, increasing the number of picture books with central characters of diverse ethnicities and providing a range of 'heroes' that children look up to, could create important opportunities for children's (imaginary) multicultural encounters.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to better understand how adults (parents and librarians) select picture books for children. It aimed to position books as part of the material culture of home and library spaces, as important objects that reflect parents' and librarians' values and perspectives. In particular, it aimed to investigate whether ethnic diversity was a priority when selecting picture books for children. By extending the theoretical perspective of everyday multiculturalism, this thesis also sought to investigate picture books as spaces for multicultural encounters to be experienced by children, through picture books and pretend play of their characters.

7.1 Key findings

The project's aims and findings respond to a gap in research exploring ethnic diversity in Australian children's picture books. The first results chapter (Chapter 4) explored the significance of picture books as material culture. Library and home spaces were investigated to see how picture books are displayed, arranged, engaged with and valued. Libraries are designed to promote children's reading and independent interaction with picture books. The layout of the children's sections demonstrates extensive planning. The value of picture books in libraries was found to be about contents, image and condition; book covers that stand out and grab attention, a quality story and in sturdy condition. The librarians explained that books deemed to not have these values are often removed. Ethnic diversity is physically separated out in the library spaces. Community language books are kept in separate locations to target ethnic minority children only. There are no processes in place for the librarians to prioritise the display of English-language picture books that portray ethnic diversity for both ethnic majority and ethnic minority children.

The home book collections of twelve parents were examined to understand how picture books make their way into the home - where they are positioned, how they are organised and what value they hold. The results showed that home book collections are highly valued by parents and are used daily. Parents also prioritise children's ability to access books independently and position them in locations of convenience -

loungerooms and bedrooms. Certain books that have accumulated meaning and value maintain their place within the collection, for example, books with sentimental value. Parents' own preferences, values and ideals of good parenting determine whether books remain in the collection or whether they are ultimately discarded. Many parents described commercial and branded books as 'rubbish' and explained that they make them disappear even though their children appear to enjoy them. The parents emphasised the importance of quality picture books of which they approve. In doing so, they subtly constituted themselves (through their picture book collections) as responsible parents.

Chapter 5 described the processes librarians use to select picture books for children. The librarians involved in this study prioritise providing children with quality picture books both through their collections and in 'Storytime'. The librarians explained that they aim to provide a wide range of picture books by using several suppliers, having a broad criteria profile, or including their clients' preferences. Ethnically diverse picture books are not prioritised by the librarians involved in this study. The chapter also explored the potential for libraries to position picture books as sites for experiencing ethnic diversity. However, the findings suggest that the librarians have generally overlooked the opportunity for this to occur. For the most part, they presented ethnic diversity as something that is separate from the mainstream collection in the form of community language books. In addition, the librarians operationalised an understanding of ethnic diversity that was outward looking, often mentioning books that portray people living in other countries. They appeared to be less focused on picture books that portray diverse groups living side-by-side in Australian society. The librarian situated in the most ethnically diverse location did not see the need for picture books portraying an ethnically diverse Australia. One librarian, however, did imply that children's encounters with ethnic diversity through picture books can shape their 'real world' encounters with difference.

Chapter 6 examined how parents select picture books for their children. Similarly to the librarians, parents prefer picture books with good stories, illustrations and format. They also prefer age-appropriate lengths and themes. For most parents, ethnic diversity is not a key priority in their selection process. However, a number of the Anglo-Australian parents noted that picture books can teach their children that

Australian society is ethnically diverse. Others noted that picture books can teach their children that the world is full of different cultures and landscapes. Most non-Anglo-Australian parents expressed a preference for picture books that help portray their own cultural heritage, as well as realistic representations of Australian society. However, some parents admitted giving little or no thought to how ethnicity is portrayed in picture books and there were only two participants who described actively searching for picture books portraying a multicultural Australia. Chapter 6 also explored the potential for picture books to function as sites for children's everyday multicultural encounters. It explored ways in which children relate to and interact with characters and storylines beyond the pages of their books – through pretend play. The parents generally agreed that it is easier for their children to relate to characters similar to themselves, but many had witnessed them playing with, or pretending to be, their favourite characters - regardless of their own or the characters' ethnicities. Parents' observations of their children's pretend play demonstrate how picture book characters have a more-than-representational significance in young children's lives. However, research incorporating children and including observation of their interactions with picture books and their characters is needed to further develop this understanding.

7.2 Further Research

There is much scope for further research into Australian children's picture books and ethnicity. This research was based on a relatively small sample of parents and librarians due to time constraints. The sample size could be increased and also incorporate perspectives from early childhood educators, publishers and illustrators. Also, due to the length of ethics approval time, no Indigenous participants or children were recruited into the study. Future research should endeavour to include Indigenous perspectives and children's perspectives. Methods of participant observation would be useful to extend this research and focus groups could be used to reach wider groups with in-depth discussions. The focus of the study could also be extended beyond young children's picture books, to include a wider range of children's books.

Additionally, besides ethnic diversity, further research could examine if/how other minority groups in Australian society, for instance, single parents, same-sex couples

or disabled children, are represented in children's literature. Indeed, many parents highlighted this gap in children's picture books, in the interviews, although it was not the focus of this project.

This project demonstrates the importance of ethnically diverse picture books as objects with more-than-representational significance. Librarians and parents *should* focus on providing picture books with realistic portrayals of ethnic diversity in Australian society, for all children. However, Australian authors/illustrators also need to incorporate more ethnically diverse settings into quality picture books and particularly, ethnic minority central characters.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information sheets and consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS



The Project: *How do adults select picture books for children?*

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: This is an invitation to take part in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how adults (parents/guardians) select picture books for the children under their care. We are interested in gathering perspectives from a range of cultural groups – including people from Anglo- Australian and migrant backgrounds, and Indigenous Australians.

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WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO: If you choose to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately an hour. This will be an informal conversation where we would like to find out more about how you select picture books for your child/ren. Examples of questions that you will be asked include: how do you and your child/ren use picture books in your home? What factors do you take into account when buying picture books? Can you give us some examples of picture books that are really important to you and/or your child/ren? What makes these picture books important? There are no right or wrong answers: we are interested in learning about your perspectives. As a part of the interview, and with your consent, we would like to take photographs of your picture book collection. These photographs are for the purpose of recording your favourite picture books as well as the spatial layout of the collection. No photographs of people or items that may identify your home will be taken.

With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed to assist interpretation. However, the transcripts always remain confidential, stored on a password protected computer at the University of Wollongong. Project data will be stored in de-identified form for 5 years in accordance with ethical guidelines. Access to the transcripts is only by the researchers. The data collected will be used in an honours thesis and may be used for academic journal articles, books, conferences and media interviews in the future.

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS: Apart from the time taken to participate in this research, we can foresee no inconvenience for you. The interviews will be arranged to take place at a time and venue convenient to you. If possible, the interview will be conducted in your home so that the researcher can view your picture book collection during the discussion. However, if this does not suit you, the interview can take place at another location. If you choose to participate in this research, you will be eligible to win one of four \$50 shopping vouchers.

Your involvement with this project is entirely voluntary and you will not be pressured to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with. You may withdraw your participation at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided up to two weeks following the completion of your participation in the research. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect in any way your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS: This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rs0-ethics@uow.edu.au

If you have any questions about the study, please contact: Lorelle Metusela or Natascha Klocker on the details listed above.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR LIBRARIANS



The Project: *How do adults select picture books for children?*

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: This is an invitation to take part in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of how adults (librarians) select picture books for the children under their care.

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ljm996@uowmail.edu.au

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO: If you choose to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately an hour. This will be an informal conversation where we would like to find out more about how you select picture books for the child/ren who access your service. Questions will be centred around factors that you take into account when selecting books, and whether there are particular types of picture books that you think are important to provide for children. Examples of questions that you will be asked include: what do you think makes a good picture book? How do you think picture books affect children? What do you think picture books tell children about society? There are no right or wrong answers. The emphasis is on what your practices and decisions are regarding the selection of picture books. As a part of the interview, and with your consent, we would like to take photographs of your picture book collections. These photographs are for the purpose of recording the spatial layout of the collection and no photographs of people will be taken.

With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed to assist interpretation. However, the transcripts always remain confidential, stored on a password protected computer at the University of Wollongong. Project data will be stored in de-identified form for 5 years in accordance with ethical guidelines. Access to the transcripts is only by the researchers. The data collected will be used in an honours thesis and may be used for academic journal articles, books, conferences and media interviews in the future.

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS: Apart from the time taken to participate in this research, we can foresee no inconvenience for you.

The interviews will be arranged to take place at a time and venue convenient to you, such as in a quiet room in the library.

Your involvement with this project is entirely voluntary and you will not be pressured to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with. You may withdraw your participation at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided up to two weeks following the completion of your participation in the research. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect in any way your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS: This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted you can contact the UOW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rs0-ethics@uow.edu.au

If you have any questions about the study, please contact: Lorelle Metusela or Natascha Klocker on the details listed above.

Thank you for your interest in this study.



CONSENT FORM

Research Title: *How do adults select picture books for children?*

Researchers: Lorelle Metusela and Dr Natascha Klocker, Australian Centre for Cultural Environmental Research, University of Wollongong; Dr Naomi Priest, University of Melbourne.

I have been provided with information about the project '*How do adults select picture books for children?*'

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research, which include the time taken to participate in the interview. I understand that there will be no photographs taken of people including myself, my family, other persons as well as personal details. I have had an opportunity to ask the researchers any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong or the University of Melbourne. I also understand that I can withdraw any data that I have contributed to the project up until two weeks after my participation has been completed.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Lorelle Metusela (ljm996@uowmail.edu.au) or Dr Natascha Klocker (natascha@uow.edu.au). If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au. By signing below I am indicating my consent to (please tick):

- ☐ Participate in interviews
- ☐ Have photographs of my picture book collections taken
- ☐ Have audio-recordings of interviews made for the purposes of transcription

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for an honours thesis and may be used for academic journal articles, books, conferences and media interviews in the future. I consent for the data I provide to be used in these ways. I understand that my confidentiality will be protected in all publications and media activities associated with this research.

Signed

Date

.....
Name (please print)

...../...../.....

.....

Appendix B: Letter of introduction

Selecting Picture Books for Children



I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a research project being led by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The project aims to explore how adults select picture books for children. You have been contacted because your library is located in one of the suburbs chosen for this study.

The purpose of the research project is to better understand what factors librarians take into account when selecting picture books for young children.

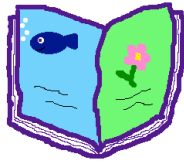
If you decide to participate in the research, you will be asked to take part in an interview. You will also be asked to display and offer advertising leaflets about the project to parents that come to your library. Further details about the researchers, the research aims, and the research methods, are provided in the participant information sheet attached to this letter.

Please feel free to contact me on 0477 075 372; ljm996@uowmail.edu.au if you have any questions about the research, and/or if you are interested in participating.

Thank you for your time,

Lorelle Metusela

Appendix C: Leaflet



Do you read picture books to young children?



Researchers from the University of Wollongong are recruiting people to participate in a study investigating how adults select picture books for pre-school aged children. If you are the parent/guardian of a young child, we would love to speak to you and to learn more about your experiences and views. We are interested in gathering perspectives from a range of cultural groups – including people from Anglo-Australian and migrant backgrounds, and Indigenous Australians. The aim of the research is to better understand how adults feel about picture books, and how they choose books to read to their children. All participants will enter a draw with a chance of winning one of four \$50 grocery vouchers. If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact Lorelle Metusela for more information (0477 075 372; ljm996@uowmail.edu.au)

Appendix D: Interview Schedules

Interview schedule – librarians

In this interview I will ask questions to gain an understanding of how you choose picture books for your library – both in terms of the ones you keep in your collections, and those that are chosen for reading sessions.

To begin with, can I ask you to tell me a bit about your role at this library, and how long you've worked here?

How often are picture books read to children at this venue?

Would you mind showing me where you keep your picture books? Is this the same place where picture book reading sessions happen?

Are all of your picture books together in one place? Or are there different categories/types of books that are kept in different places?

How are they organised – alphabetically or in some kind of thematic order? (If thematic, try to find out what the rationale is for the different locations, and what they might say about which books are prioritised, spatially).

Are Australian books and international collections kept in the same place, or do they tend to be jumbled in together? (Again, if separate, try to find out the rationale and what it says about the different priority given to Australian v. international books).

May I take a photograph of the location/s of your picture books?

What makes this a good part of the library for displaying/reading picture books?

How does the picture book section of this library make you feel?

Can you select a few of your favourite picture books and tell me about them?

Can I take a photograph of these picture books?

What does it take for a picture book to be added to the library's collection? If there is a system/process can you describe this?

Who is responsible for selecting picture books for this library's collection?

When selecting picture books to add to the library's collection do the contents get checked?

What types of picture books make it onto the shelves in this library – are there certain characteristics that are preferred? Are certain characteristics avoided?

What does it take for a picture book to be used during reading sessions/story time at this library? What types of characteristics do those books need to have? (What do you look for, or avoid?)

What do you think makes a good picture book? What do you think makes a picture book not so good?

Ok, so now can you tell me, how do you think picture books affect children?

What do you think Australian picture books say about Australian society, and the people who live in it?

What types of places or landscapes tend to be portrayed in Australian picture books?

What types of people and families tend to be portrayed in Australian picture books?

Can you tell me about any differences between picture books published overseas, and those from Australia?

Can you tell me about any differences you have noticed between picture books that were published a long time ago, and more recent ones?

What types of characters do you like to see in children's picture books?

How does the nature of the neighbourhood/community that this library is located in influence its picture book collection? How does it influence the types of books that are presented during reading time?

Have you noticed anything about the ethnicity or appearance of characters in the picture books in the library collection/you read to children?

How does the ethnicity of the characters affect how you choose books?

Have you ever purposely chosen a book that portrays a particular ethnic group?

Which groups and why? Do you remember which book that was?

Have you ever purposely rejected a picture book because of the way it portrays a particular ethnic group? Do you remember which book that was?

Have you ever spoken to children about the ethnic backgrounds of characters in the books you read to them? Have you ever noticed children commenting on the ethnic backgrounds of characters in picture books?

How do you think your own ethnic background influence the decisions you make about picture books?

How does the range of picture books kept in this library cater for the range of ethnic groups who use the library?

How easy is it for you to access picture books that portray ethnically diverse communities?

Have you noticed anything about the ways specific ethnic groups are portrayed in children's picture books you've read?

Can you think of any interesting examples of ethnic diversity in books that you've read?

How do you think children who aren't from Anglo-Australian backgrounds can connect to the characters/stories shown in Australian picture books?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Interview schedule – parents/guardians

The aim of this ‘interview’ is to understand how you select picture books and what types of picture books you prefer for your children to have access to.

How old are your child/ren?

How do picture books fit into your routine with your child/ren?

Do you keep different types of books in different places – or are they all jumbled up together?

Why did you decide to keep them in this particular place/room?

Where in your home do you usually read picture books to your children? Where do your kids read picture books when they are by themselves?

Why do you/they choose those places?

What does it take for a picture book to make it from the shop into your home?

How does your home picture book collection make you feel?

Can you select a few of your favourites and tell me about them? Can you tell me about any of your least favourites?

What do you do (will you do) when your bookshelf fills up?

Do you ever use picture books from a public library? How do you choose which ones to take home with you?

When selecting picture books either to add to your home collection or from a library do you check the contents?

How do you check what is in picture books before you read them? What do you look for? Or avoid?

What do you think makes a good picture book? What do you think makes a picture book not so good?

Ok, so now can you tell me, how do you think picture books affect children?

Do you know of any Australian picture books? Can you name any of the titles/authors?

What do you think Australian picture books say about Australian society, and the people who live in it?

What types of places or landscapes tend to be portrayed in Australian picture books?

Have you noticed any differences between picture books published overseas, and those from Australia?

Have you noticed any differences between picture books that were published a long time ago, and more recent ones?

What types of characters do you like to see in children's picture books?

Have you noticed anything about the ethnicity or appearance of characters in the picture books you read to your child/ren?

How does the ethnicity of the characters affect how you choose books?

Have you ever purposely chosen a book that portrays a particular ethnic group?

Which groups and why? Do you remember which book that was?

Have you ever purposely rejected a picture book because of the way it portrays a particular ethnic group? Do you remember which book that was?

Have you ever spoken to your child/ren about the ethnic backgrounds of characters in the books you read to them? Have your children ever commented on the ethnic backgrounds of characters in picture books?

How do you think your own ethnic background influences the decisions you make about picture books?

How do you feel about the general level of ethnic diversity portrayed in picture books? Which groups in society do you think are missing / under-represented in picture books?

Can you think of any interesting examples of ethnic diversity in books that you've read? These can be examples of good things, or examples of things that you might have considered to be a bit problematic.

Have you noticed anything about the ways specific ethnic groups are portrayed in children's picture books you've read?

How easy is it for you to access picture books that portray ethnically diverse communities?

What do you think Australian picture books say about who belongs, or is valued, in Australian society?

How do you think children who aren't from Anglo-Australian backgrounds can connect to the characters/stories shown in Australian picture books?