

# Using Multicultural and Global Picturebooks to Enhance Practices in Early Childhood Education

Rhoda Myra Garces-Bacsal<sup>1,\*</sup>, Najla Sultan AlOwais<sup>2</sup>, Hind Tuaib Ghufli<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Special Education, College of Education United Arab Emirates University

<sup>2</sup>Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education United Arab Emirates University

<sup>3</sup>Department of Special Education, College of Education United Arab Emirates University

\*Corresponding author. Email: myrabacsal@uaeu.ac.ae

## ABSTRACT

Research indicates that early childhood educators have been making use of diverse books and stories to expand the global consciousness of young readers inside the classroom [1], [2]. Children are meaning-making beings. As young architects of their worlds, they attempt to make sense of their reality through their immediate experiences or the comfort derived from the pages of a book. Leveraging on a research project that examines diverse picturebooks that explore socially and culturally sensitive issues for inclusive practices, this paper introduces participants to a range of multicultural and international picturebooks and will discuss the significance of having access to these titles.

**Keywords:** Diverse picturebooks in early childhood, multicultural and global picturebooks, children's books for inclusive practices.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research has consistently shown how children's books are useful and successful tools for discussing social and emotional issues [3], [4] and in creating an open and diverse society "that strives to minimize discrimination and to care for the development of its members" [5]. Lysaker and Tonge [6] further contend that stories are "especially powerful influences on the ability to understand or imagine the thoughts and feelings of others". Diverse picturebooks (used interchangeably with multicultural picturebooks in this paper) are especially effective because it validates children's lived experiences [3], promotes recognition of social differences [7], contributes to the development of empathy in children [8], [9], respect and understanding between and among cultures [10]. These all point towards deeper or meaningful learning, allowing readers to synthesize their understanding through a lived experience of the text in their own personal lives. It is important to note that early childhood educators are now found to increasingly utilize outstanding diverse picturebooks in their classrooms as part of their efforts to be more culturally responsive and to introduce a more global perspective at a young age [1], [2].

## 2. DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: MULTICULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL PICTUREBOOKS

While multicultural picturebooks are traditionally referred to as 'mirror' and 'window' books [11], international picturebooks are illustrated stories that are not originally published in the United States, Canada, or the UK, and have been translated from their original language into the local language where they are published [12]. Hadaway [13] further views global literature as the umbrella in which multicultural and international picturebooks can be subsumed under, and inclusive of diversity not just in ethnicity or race but also varying forms of ability, socio-economic status, language, religion, and gender identity.

This paper is meant to provide a diverse book list or a thematic text-set to build early childhood educators' capacity to find similar reading materials. This becomes even more imperative given how research indicates how early childhood educators were not able to effectively name picturebook titles which include multicultural characters and themes [11].

The creation of such lists for early childhood educators is not a new endeavour, with the first author sharing an early childhood diverse booklist for social and emotional learning [14] and for gifted and talented

students [15]. Klefstad and Martinez [16] also created a list inclusive of Kenyan, Hispanic, Chinese and Korean picturebook titles to promote cultural awareness among young readers along with recommended book bonding activities; while Martens et al [17] provided text-sets about pre-schooler's identity formation and responsible decision making.

### 3. METHOD OF BOOK SELECTION

The thematic text-set provided in this paper is part of a larger research project that examines the reading lives of teacher educators, and special education and early childhood students coming from a teacher training institute in the United Arab Emirates. The research team is multidisciplinary and multi-ethnic with a UAE-based Filipino clinical psychologist, London-based Filipino socio-linguist, Sudanese-American special education teacher educator, one Malay-Singaporean Masteral student from Singapore, and two Emirati PhD students specializing in special education and mathematics education respectively. The research also aims to develop a catalogue of picturebook titles demonstrating an awareness of the "others" in society, including special educational needs.

The lead investigator of the research team took responsibility for the selection of diverse book titles related to themes that touch on hope, healing, and refuge during troubled times, guided by Harper and Bran's [18] checklist for selecting and evaluating diverse picturebooks. The criteria include authenticity of the narrative, credibility of the characters, realistic depiction of setting and theme of the story, and developmental appropriateness of the narrative. The compound word *picturebook* is used to refer to the polysemic nature of the stories, allowing spaces for multiple meanings and interpretations by the reader [19].

### 4. DIVERSE PICTUREBOOK LIST

The diverse picturebook titles are arranged according to the following themes: grief and healing; transitions and leaving home; book series depicting hope, dreams, empathy, peace and love; inspirational and motivational stories; being brave, kind and good; taking refuge in one's imagination; building friendships and forming a community; social justice; and mindfulness. This is, by no means, an exhaustive list of multicultural picture books related to these themes. It is meant to serve as a starting point or a sample that early childhood educators can draw from.

Table 1. List of multicultural picturebooks related to the themes.

<b>Grief and Healing</b>
<i>The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden</i> by Heather Smith, illustrated by Rachel Wada, published by Orca Book Publishers, 2019. (The author is Canadian, the illustrator is Japanese-Cantonese-Canadian). Freeman Book Award 2019 winner.
<i>Stormy</i> by Guojing (illustrator) published by Schwartz & Wade, 2019. (Guojing is a Chinese author/illustrator based in Singapore).
<i>I Miss My Grandpa</i> by Jin Xiaojing, published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019. (The author is from China based in New York City).
<i>Maia and What Matters</i> by Tina Mortier, illustrated by Kaatje Vermeire translated by David Colmer, published by Book Island Ltd, 2013. (The author and illustrator are from Belgium).
<i>Birdsong</i> by Juliety Flett (illus.) published by Greystone Kids, 2019. (The author/illustrator is Canadian).
<i>Some Days</i> from Argentina by Maria Wernicke (illus.) translated by Lawrence Schimmel published by Amazon Crossing Kids, 2020. (The author/illustrator is Argentinean).
<i>Srinti</i> by Sofie Dewayani, illustrated by Cecilia Hidayat, published by Yayasan Litara, 2015. (Both author and illustrator are Indonesian).
<b>Transitions &amp; Leaving Home</b>
<i>A New Kind of Wild</i> by Zara Gonzalez Hoang (illus), published by Dial Books, 2020. (The author is Puerto Rican-American).
<i>That Neighbor Kid</i> by Daniel Miyares (illus.) published by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2017. (The author/illustrator is North American).
<i>Wallpaper</i> by Thao Lam (illus.) published by OwlKids, 2018. A wordless picturebook. (The author/illustrator is Vietnamese/Canadian).
<i>In a Jar</i> by Deborah Marcero (illus.) published by G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2020. (The author/illustrator is North American).
<i>Florette</i> by Anna Walker (illus.) published by Clarion Books, 2018. (The author/illustrator is Australian).
<b>Book Series on Hope, Dreams, Empathy, Peace, Love</b>
<i>Wish</i> by Mathew Cordell (illus.) published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2015. (The Author/Illustrator is North American).
<i>Dream</i> by Mathew Cordell (illus.) published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2017.
<i>Hope</i> by Mathew Cordell (illus.) published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019.
<i>I am Yoga</i> by Susan Verde, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, published by Harry N. Abrams, 2015. (The author is North American; the illustrator is Canadian).
<i>I am Peace</i> by Susan Verde, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, published by Harry N. Abrams, 2017.

<i>I am Human</i> by Susan Verde, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, published by Harry N. Abrams, 2018.
<i>I am Love</i> by Susan Verde, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds, published by Harry N. Abrams, 2019.
<b>Inspirational &amp; Motivational Stories</b>
<i>If I was the Sunshine</i> by Julie Fogliano, illustrated by Loren Long, published by Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019. (The author and illustrator are North American).
<i>Sometimes You Fly</i> by Katherine Applegate, illustrated by Jennifer Black Reinhardt published by Clarion Books, 2018. (The author and illustrator are North American).
<i>Just in Case You Want to Fly</i> by Julie Fogliano, illustrated by Christian Robinson, published by Neal Porter Books, 2019. (The author is North American the illustrator is African American)
<i>The Wonderful Things You Will Be</i> by Emily Winfield Martin (illus.) published by Random House Books for Young Readers, 2015. (The author/illustrator is North American).
<i>Wherever You Go</i> by Pat Zietlow Miller, illustrated by Eliza Wheeler, published by LB Kids, 2019. (The author and illustrator are North American).
<b>Being Brave, Kind &amp; Good</b>
<i>When You are Brave</i> by Pat Zietlow Miller, illustrated by Eliza Wheeler, published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019.
<i>Brave Molly</i> by Brooke Boynton-Hughes (illus.), published by Chronicle Books, 2019. (The author is North American).
<i>I will be Fierce</i> by Bea Birdsong, illustrated by Nidhi Chanani, published by Roaring Brook Press, 2019. (The author is North American, the illustrator is Indian-American).
<i>The Starkeeper</i> by Faith Pray (illus.), published by Random House Books for Young Readers, 2020. (The author is North American).
<i>I am Every Good Thing</i> by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James, published by Nancy Paulsen Books, 2020. (Author and illustrator are African Americans).
<b>Taking Refuge in One's Imagination</b>
<i>Imagine!</i> By Raul Colon (illus.), published by Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books, 2018. (The author/illustrator is Puerto Rican-American).
<i>The Imaginaries</i> by Emily Winfield Martin (illus.), published by Random House Books for Young Readers, 2020. (The author is North American).
<i>I Wonder</i> by Kari Ann Holt, illustrated by Kenard Pak, published by Random House Books for Young Readers, 2019. (The author is from the US; illustrator is Asian American).
<i>What If</i> by Samantha Berger, illustrated by Mike Curato, published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018. (The author and illustrator are North Americans).

<b>Reaching Out, Building Friendships, Forming a Community</b>
<i>The Saida Arrived</i> by Susana Gomez Redondo, illustrated by Sonja Wimmer, published by Blue Dot Kids Press, 2020. (The author is from Spain; the illustrator is from Germany).
<i>The Day You Begin</i> by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael Lopez, published by Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018. (The author is African American; the illustrator is Mexican American)
<i>A Friend for Henry</i> by Jenn Bailey, illustrated by Mika Song, published by Chronicle Books, 2019. (The author is North American; the illustrator is Asian American)
<i>My Best Friend</i> by Julie Fogliano, illustrated by Jillian Tamaki, published by Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2020. (The author is North American, the illustrator is Japanese-Canadian).
<i>What is Given from the Heart</i> by Patricia C. McKissack, illustrated by April Harrison, published by Schwartz & Wade, 2019. (The author and illustrator are African American)
<b>Social Justice</b>
<i>A is for Activist</i> by Innosanto Nagara (illus.), published by Seven Stories Press, 2012. (The author is Indonesian American)
<i>Counting on Community</i> by Innosanto Nagara (illus.), published by Seven Stories Press, 2015.
<i>My Night in the Planetarium</i> by Innosanto Nagara (illus.), published by Seven Stories Press, 2016.
<b>Mindfulness</b>
<i>Hurry Up</i> by Kate Dopirak, illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal, published by Simon and Schuster, 2020. (The author and Illustrator are North American).
<i>Your Mind is like the Sky</i> by Bronwen Ballard, illustrated by Laura Carlin, published by Frances Lincoln Publishers Ltd. (The author and illustrators are from the UK).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Research indicates that quality multicultural picturebooks serve as a powerful means for promoting interconnections between social and ecological caring [20]. As Nikolajeva [9] noted, fiction creates situations in which emotions are simulated, and “for a young reader, who may have limited or no experience of real-life emotions, literary, second-hand experience is particularly valuable”. It is hoped that this preliminary diverse text-set can provide spaces for young readers to experience empathy, compassion, and a sense of refuge during troubled times.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bennett SV, Gunn AA, Gayle-Evans G. Culturally responsive literacy practices in an early childhood community. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. 2018;46(2):241–8.

- [2] Kim SJ, Wee SJ, Lee YM. Teaching kindergartners racial diversity through multicultural literature: A case study in a kindergarten classroom in Korea. *Early Education and Development*. 2016;27(3):402–20.
- [3] Botelho MJ, Rudman MK. *Critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature: Mirrors, windows, and doors*. New York: Routledge; 2009.
- [4] Lukens RJ, Smith JJ, Coffel CM. *A critical handbook of children's literature*. New Jersey: Pearson Education; 2013.
- [5] Schwarcz JH, Schwarcz C. *The picture book comes of age: Looking at childhood through the art of illustration*. Chicago: American Library Association; 1991.
- [6] Lysaker J, Tonge C. Learning to understand others through relationally oriented reading. *Reading Teacher*. 2013;66(8):632-41.
- [7] Hinton-Johnson KV. In the process of becoming multicultural: Reflections of a first year teacher. *The New Advocate*. 2002;15(4):309-13.
- [8] Bal PM, Veltkamp M. How does fiction reading influence empathy? An experimental investigation on the role of emotional transportation. *Plos One*. 2013;8(1):1-12.
- [9] Nikolajeva M. Reading other people’s minds through word and image. *Children’s Literature in Education*. 2012;43(3):273-91.
- [10] Singer J, Smith S. The potential of multicultural literature: changing understanding of self and others. *Multicultural Perspectives*. 2003; 5(2):17-23.
- [11] Brinson SA. Knowledge of multicultural literature among early childhood educators. *Multicultural Education*. 2012;19(2):30–3.
- [12] Yokota J, Teale W. Striving for international understanding through literature. *Reading Teacher*. 2017;70(5):629–63.
- [13] Hadaway N. Building bridges of understanding. In: Hadaway N, McKenna M, editors. *Breaking boundaries with global literature*. Newark DE: International Reading Association; 2007. pp. 1-6.
- [14] Garces-Bascal RM. Diverse books for diverse children: Building an early childhood diverse booklist for social and emotional learning. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. 2020;0(0):1-30.
- [15] Garces-Bascal RM. Building a diverse social and emotional learning booklist for gifted and talented learners. *World Talent Web Newsletter*. 2020;5:5-8.
- [16] Klefstad JM, Martinez KC. Promoting young children’s cultural awareness and appreciation through multicultural books. *Young Children*. 2013;68(5):74-81.
- [17] Martens P, Martens R, Doyle MH. Building intercultural understandings through global literature. *The Reading Teacher*. 2015;68(8):609–17.
- [18] Harper LJ, Bran ST. More alike than different: Promoting respect through multicultural books and literacy strategies. *Childhood Education*. 2010;86(4):224–33.
- [19] Ghosh K. Who’s afraid of the big bad wolf? Children’s responses to the portrayal of wolves in picturebook. In: Evans J, editor. *Challenging and controversial picturebooks*. London: Routledge; 2015. pp. 201-24.
- [20] Reisberg M. Social/ecological caring with multicultural picture books: Placing pleasure in art education. *Studies in Art Education*. 2008;49(3):251-67.