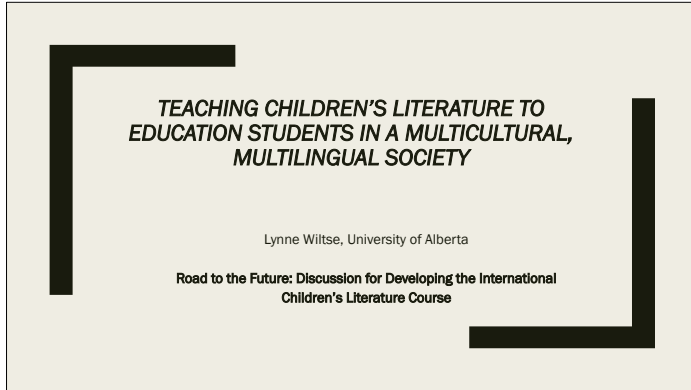
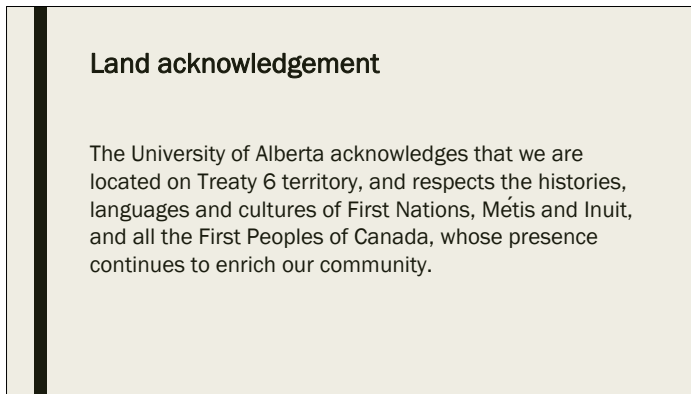


Teaching Children's Literature to Education Students in a Multicultural, Multilingual Society

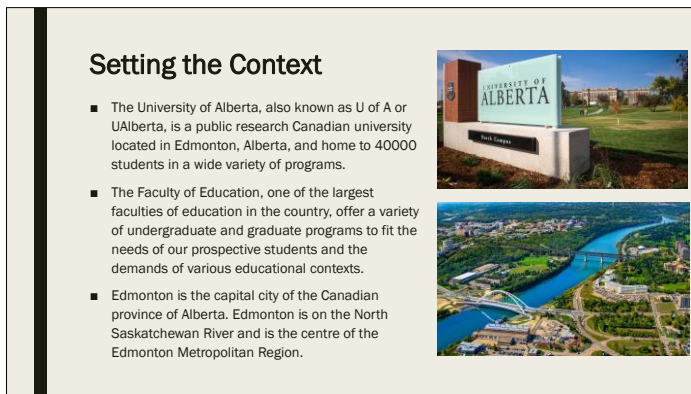
Lynne Wiltse (Professor, University of Alberta)



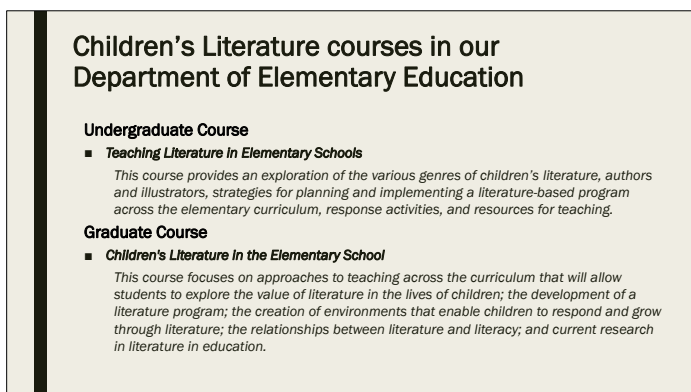
My presentation for the Road to the Future Symposium is about teaching children's literature in a multicultural, multilingual Canadian society.



The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and all the First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our community.



In this slide, I have provided contextual details related to the presentation. The children's literature courses I teach are in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, which is situated in Edmonton, Alberta, a capital city in northern Alberta.



In this slide, I explain the focus for the two children's literature courses I teach, one for pre-service teachers and the other for in-service teachers. Both courses relate to teaching in elementary schools.

What's trending in children's literature?

1. The influence of visual culture on children's books

- children are immersed in a visual culture in which images are central to their experiences and interactions.

2. Literature for a Diverse Society

- A problematic trend is the continuing lack of cultural diversity in children's books.

***What is the Canadian connection with the diversity trend?**

- Setterington (2016) argues that one reason Canada publishes so many diverse books is that the majority of books are published by independent houses, the opposite of the US. He notes that publishers such as Groundwood concentrate on making the very best books, instead of considering sales and marketing.

Short, K. (2018). What's Trending in Children's Literature and Why It Matters. *Language Arts*, 95(5), 287-298.

My first reaction about the comment from Kathy Short's article, *What's Trending in Children's Literature*, that the lack of diversity continues to be a problematic trend, was surprise. This is because diversity in children's literature is very much part of my work in both teaching and research. I am

surrounded by books about cultural diversity. And then I realized that part of the difference the author identifies is the Canadian connection with this diversity trend. Setterington mentions in this article that one reason Canada publishes so many diverse books is that the majority of books are published by independent houses, which is the opposite of the US. He notes that publishers such as Groundwood concentrate on making the very best books, instead of considering sales and marketing. We do have a lot more diverse literature in Canada and I have been part of a number of research projects for the last dozen years or more looking at using that literature with teachers and pre-service students as well.

Background to the diversity trend in Canada

Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1971

In a statement to the House of Commons on 8 October 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced multiculturalism as an official government policy. Multiculturalism was intended to preserve the cultural freedom of all individuals and provide recognition of the cultural contributions of diverse ethnic groups to Canadian society.



Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 Website

And, so I will provide a bit of background to this slide. Canada is often known for its multiculturalism and of course that view may be different from outside the country rather than inside the country. We have had this policy since 1971. At that time I was a student in school and I had a very positive and naive

view of this policy. Once I got my education degree, I found myself in my first teaching job in an isolated remote Indigenous community. I realized how much I had taken for granted. This was the first time I was introduced to the concept of mirrors and windows, although I didn't learn about the metaphor for some time. But, children need books that are mirrors in which they can see themselves reflected, and books that are windows open to the rest of the world. Rudine Sims Bishop is responsible for this metaphor, along with the inclusion of sliding glass doors. I grew up reading books in which I saw myself reflected on a regular basis and so I took that for granted. My first students, who were Indigenous, didn't see themselves reflected in the books they read, at least not in a positive way.

In my first teaching job, Indigenous people were represented in a very negative

way in the literature my students were required to read. While this was one of the most discomforting experiences of my teaching career, it was the start of learning

Mirrors and Windows Metaphor

Children need books that are mirrors in which they can see and learn about themselves, and books that are windows open to the rest of the world (Patsy Aldana, 2008).

Ingrid Johnston (2010) explains that it is “important to be able to recognize ourselves in a book, particularly if we, as readers, are from a culture that has been marginalized or previously unrecognized in literary texts in the west” (p. 135)

about how children need to see themselves reflected in positive ways in the literature that they are reading, especially for those who have been traditionally marginalized, as the students sitting in front of me were. This is one of the metaphors that I bring into the teaching.

Student’s post responding to Windows and Mirrors metaphor

Growing up I would find myself mirrored in countless books, no matter the genre. While I wasn’t always able to relate to the characters specific situation, I could relate to them through various demographics, such as: gender, race, social class, sexual orientation.

For me, literature as a window is the most understated opportunity for us. We live during a time where the world’s oppression of peoples is on full-time display. This has resulted in a great deal of misunderstanding, hate, and a lack of compassion for the people most affected by it. A great deal of labour has gone into creating work intended for education, understanding, and empathy. We have to be more willing participants and engage with that work, and use it as a window to do better.

As future educators, I think we have a great responsibility to provide as many opportunities as possible for all students to both see themselves represented in books and also see the world through the perspectives of others with different lived experiences than them.

This slide is of a student’s eClass post, in response to learning about the windows and mirrors metaphor.

Disrupting Single Stories

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (Aduchie, 2009, para. 24)

Students post of her disruption of single story of Indigenous People:


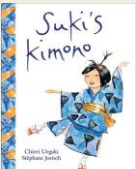



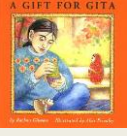
Up until a few years ago I had only learned about Indigenous peoples from the colonial perspective. I had very limited interactions with Indigenous peoples and the ones that I did have were not representative of the community as a whole (e.g. homeless, drunk). Only until I learned about what actually happened within Indian Residential Schools etc. did I understand the effects the trauma caused. Having an opportunity to hear an elder speak about her experience at IRS dramatically changed the way that I perceived Indigenous people and I have gained respect for their community, cultures, traditions and beliefs.

Tachida, C., Ryan, C. & Ticknor, A.S. (2014). Building on Mirrors and Windows: Encouraging the disruption of “single stories” through children’s literature. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 40(2), 28-39.

This comment is from one of my current students who responded that she had a very limited and single story of Indigenous peoples. However, during recent coursework in her education program, this student learned about what actually happened within Indian Residential schools and had the opportunity to hear residential school survivors speak. This caused a dramatic change to her thinking. This resulted in having her single story of indigenous people disrupted.

Books reflecting the praise of multiculturalism

...an inclusive and accepting Canadian society in which minorities of all descriptions were able to maintain their own unique cultures and ethnic identities.

We examine books which reflect the positive side of multiculturalism.

...and also the critique of multiculturalism

...which did not address social or systemic racism.

Through children's literature, children can interrogate "notions of a homogenous sense of nation" (Johnston, Bainbridge, & Shariff, 2007, p. 75).

We also read children's literature that interrogates the notion of a homogeneous nation. Here we have books about Japanese internment during the second World War world war and Ukrainian internment during the first world war. We also have a book about the mistreatment of Chinese building our National Railway. And, then there's Shi-she-etko and sequel, Shin-chi's Canoe, both about Indian residential schooling.

M is for Myth

So, we get brushed with a rather nice stroke. But, I think M in Multiculturalism stands for *Myth*, not *Maple*. Just like everybody else, we've done horrible things to our minorities.

As Galway (2008) notes, how we teach our history to children matters. The "connection between the past and the present makes the manner in which a nation communicates its history to children, who represent the present and the future, particularly significant" (p. 115).

In this slide, a student who has learned about some of the difficult aspects in Canadian history, explains that the M in the alphabet book, *M is for Maple*, an iconic Canadian symbol, should stand instead for Myth.

One of the biggest problems with multiculturalism in Canada is the way the

Problematically, multiculturalism did not attend to the longstanding divides between mainstream orientations to questions of rights and those of Indigenous peoples.

Journalist and politician Wab Kinew (2013) contends that reconciliation with Indigenous People is still the most pressing social justice issue Canada faces. Land is at the heart of reconciliation.

policy did not attend to the longstanding divides between mainstream orientations and those of Indigenous people. So, although many think of Canada's Multicultural policy as positive, it has not been this way for many Indigenous people. Journalist and politician Wab Kinew contends that reconciliation with Indigenous People is still the most pressing social justice issue Canada faces. Land is at the heart of reconciliation.

How can we shape a more inclusive future for Canadians?

Multicultural children's literature can be instrumental in doing so if we use a broad definition that includes ethnicity, language, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, ableness...

At the same time, multicultural literature for children can be used to shape a more inclusive Canadian future, especially

if we use a broad definition of multicultural literature that includes ethnicity, language, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ableness. And, here are a few titles that we look at in the course that covers that range of topics.

Support bilingual programs and maintain heritage languages



Dual Language Texts

Dual language and other identity text projects demonstrated that teachers could expand the instructional space beyond simply an English-only zone to include students' and parents' multilingual repertoires... (Cummins, Hu, Markus & Montero, 2015).

When I first started in this work, I had a much more limited view of what multicultural meant that focused more on ethnicity as opposed to a broader definition. I find that many of our students come to class with a limited view of multiculturalism that focuses

more on ethnicity. While Canada has two official languages, English and French, we have support for other languages. I have my students spend a lot of time with dual language books, as we have a high immigrant population and recent refugees from various countries here in Edmonton.

Support immigrant and refugee learners



We look at books that are written in more than one language for children who are either speakers of languages other than English or children who are English speakers learning about other languages. For example, this book, *Stepping Stones*, is about a Syrian refugee family.

It is done with rock art and is written in English and Arabic.

Support Indigenous language maintenance and revival



Books written in Cree, Dene, Inuktitut, for example, and English or French can play a role in repairing the damage to Indigenous languages caused, in large part, by residential schooling.

An important topic for us is to support Indigenous language maintenance and revival. Unfortunately, many Indigenous languages have been lost or are endangered, due in large part to the damage done by having these languages forbidden at residential school.


There is a lot of children's literature now about Indian residential schools. We had a truth and Reconciliation Commission a few years ago with a follow up 94 Calls to Action. Education for reconciliation aims to make age-appropriate cur-

riculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

Many non-Indigenous teachers in Canada are both in support of and also very nervous because of the difficult history related to Indian Residential Schooling. Compared to when I started teaching many years ago, teachers now are in a better position to teach this topic through children's literature. The teaching of literature

Support the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Education for reconciliation aims to make "age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students" (Calls to Action 62.i).

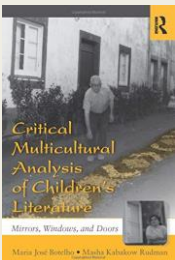


should begin with social justice. Teachers need to ask: What texts and reading practices do we privilege in our classrooms? How can the texts we choose interrogate racism? With the much needed attention currently given to the BIPOC movement, now is an apt time for action.

A critical multicultural analysis approach

Botelho and Rudman (2009) extend the use of the mirror and windows metaphor to include that of the door: "Mirrors reflect our language use and windows afford expanses to new understandings, whereas doors invite action" (p. 265).

The teaching of literature should begin with social justice. Teachers need to ask: What texts and reading practices do we privilege in our classrooms? How can the texts we choose interrogate racism?



I use a critical multicultural analysis approach in my teaching, one grounded in a social justice orientation.

Draw on children's literature research projects

Three SSHRC-funded national studies:

Preservice Teachers' Perspectives on Canadian Identity and their Understandings of Ideology in Multicultural Picture Books

Engaging Teachers with Canadian Literature for Social Justice

Developing a Pedagogy of Social Justice Through Postcolonial Literature

I draw on my research projects a lot in my teaching. These are a sampling of the research projects I have been involved in which relate children's literature and social justice.

Unlike children's literature courses in an English department, the assignments and activities we do are for the most part designed with teaching in mind. So, I engage my students in hands-on activities and assignments including literature circles, social justice digital books talks, infographics, thematic mattering projects,

Assignments designed with teaching in mind

- **Literature circles** (different compositions)
- **Social justice digital book talks** (designed for use in practicums and beyond)
- **Infographics** (e.g. postmodern picture book or just a fractured fairy tale?)
- **Thematic mattering projects** (thematic plans around an issue that 'matters')
- **Author/illustrator studies** (sharing component for future teaching purposes)
- **Research papers grounded in professional practice** (graduate students)

author/illustrator studies and research papers grounded in professional practice. Hopefully, the students will then use these practices in their own teaching.

Thank you very much.

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