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Cherylynn Bassani

Kwantlen Polytechnic University

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Ethnic Representation in Canadian Primary English Textbooks

By Cherylynn Bassani, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, British Columbia

Introduction

Research that examines ethnic representation in children's literature is limited, and that which exists almost exclusively examines American children's literature in terms of: white privilege (Gaines, 1990; Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002), accuracy of ethnic portrayal (Cai, 1994; Epps, 1997; Nilsson, 2005) and tracing the multicultural perspective in books (Gillespie et al., 1994; Vandergrift, 1993). While some publications do discuss multicultural issues in Canadian children's literature (Bainbridge et al, 1999; Carpenter, 1996; 1992; 1975; Edwards & Saltman, 2010; Saldanha, 2000) content analysis of these issues is limited (Pezold, 2000). In addition, the Canadian literature focuses broadly on children's literature, and does not examine textbooks per se. Edwards & Saltman's (2010) most recent publication, for example, makes an invaluable contribution to the history of children's literature and childhood in Canada, though it does not speak to under- or misrepresentations in Canadian textbooks. In recent years, there has been a slow growth of publications concerning children's literature, though research tends to focus on representation of gender (Crisp & Hiller, 2011; McCabe et al., 2011) and disability (Beckett et al, 2010; Golos & Annie, 2011) -not ethnicity or race. Only a handful of studies examine ethnicity or race in children's literature in the Canadian context.

The fundamental purpose of this paper is to provide an initial examination of the representation of ethnic diversity in primary level (grades 1-3) English books that the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education recommends. Ethnic representation in Canadian elementary school readers or textbooks has not been examined in the past and the scholarship that examines ethnic representation of Canadian children's book is exceedingly limited. As such, this paper makes a number of contributions to the child studies, education, multicultural and race and ethnicity literatures both in Canada and elsewhere. In writing this paper I not only hope to bring attention to the incongruency between BC's (and more generally Canada's) ethnic diversity and what is being showcased in primary-level English textbooks, but of equal importance my aim is to encourage researchers to examine ethnic representations found in textbooks, across subjects, both in Canada and elsewhere. While children's voice and agency have increasingly been embraced over the past two centuries in Western cultures, children are still a marginalized group. If we want to develop a citizenry that is open and accepting of cultural diversity we need to first recognize the ethnic and racial messages that we are socializing our children with and then hopefully delve into rectifying any inequalities. In multicultural countries such as Canada, that have a large proportion of visible minorities it is rudimentary to examine how ethnicity is being socialized in the schools. The examination of books that are used in the primary system is one rudimentary way of investigating the messages that we are teaching our children.

Multiculturalism

In Canada the concept of multiculturalism is intertwined within our Constitution and stretches to every mezzo and micro corner of society. Official multicultural ideology encourages multiple ethnicities to exist and co-exist within Canadian society. While the Constitution (1982) and Multiculturalism Act (1988) formally espouse what is often phrased as ‘tolerance’ for cultures outside of the founding Charter groups, we can see through cultural dialog –via cuisine, fashion, media, friendships and marriage –that a growing majority of Canadians espouse much more than ‘tolerance’ of a multicultural state. In the 1980s, Canada experienced a multicultural movement. Just as the (first and second wave) Feminist movements sought to bring about the normalcy of women’s rights in society and the inclusion of females as equals, the multicultural movement sought to infiltrate the normalcy of equality –irrespective of one’s ethnicity; their culture or physical attributes.

In many ways, multiculturalism has become normalized in Canadian society. Though, despite massive changes, we can also see how its infiltration has been limited in a variety of mezzo realms –such as the education system. Multiculturalism in Canada is a hugely debated topic –and there is no shared consensus of what multiculturalism is, despite the paradox that it is national policy. While the complexities and dialog surrounding multiculturalism surpass the abilities of this article, it is nonetheless an imperative starting point when discussing ethnic diversity in the education system.

Education & Textbooks

Apart from the family, the education system is the most important agent of socialization for children. There is no argument that socialization begins at birth. Research on young children and their transference between picture books and the real world reveals that children even by the age of 18 months begin to contemplate pictures (DeLoache et al, 1998) and it is suggested that the more real to life pictures appear, the greater the understanding and the child’s transferability to the real world (Preissler & Carey, 2004; Ganea et al, 2008). From a younger age than most of us would imagine, children begin to learn social order. By the time children reach the school system they have undergone initial socialization from their family and community. Both the preschool and primary years (grades 1 through 3), and consequentially school –though more specifically teachers and classes play a critical role in child socialization. It is internationally agreed that this period sets the stage for lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2008) and consequentially what children are taught and the way that they themselves fit into their school experience and overall society have immediate effects on their achievement levels, as well as their life long learning and general well-being.

Any given elementary school houses hundreds if not thousands of books: textbooks, supplementary readers, and library books. It has long been recognized that books are second only to parents in teaching children about their ethnicity (Bettiekheim, 1977). Textbooks are powerful media sources that are a part of children’s formal socialization process, and as such they are core agents of school-based socialization.

Books provide children with images of both the imagined and real worlds. As cultural artefacts produced by the predominating culture, it is important for educational stakeholders to be mindful of the 'white gaze.' This is particularly true in countries such as Canada that espouse multiculturalism. As Willis-Rivera & Meeker (2002) discuss the prevalence of the 'white gaze' in children's literature continues. Here they discuss the unconscious point of view of media and its projected (white) audience (Mulvey, 1975) that has 'white privilege' (Gaine, 1990). As they maintain white privilege is portrayed in children's literature –through the assumed audience being 'white,' having limited ethnic main characters and ethnic characters having limited power.

While much of the research on ethnicity in children's literature surrounds character portrayal, character development and issues of power –at a more foundational level who is depicted in children's books is just as important as who is not depicted in the books. In order to develop a strong sense of self, or social capital (which equates with confidence and ultimately integration into wider society) children need to see images with which they can identify. Feminist researchers have argued for over four decades that children (both boys and girls) need to see more females in children's literature and in a variety of roles (Collins et al, 1984; Tuchman, 1979; Turner-Bowker, 1996; Weitzman et al, 1972; Wharton, 2005). The concern that we once had over the 'symbolic annihilation' of females in children's literature and its association with discrimination -ultimately a lower value being placed on females in society (Wharton, 2005) is no different from the symbolic annihilation of ethnic minorities in Canadian children's textbooks today.

Limited and inaccurate ethnic content in textbooks are apt to have detrimental effects on child socialization: whether the child is from an ethnic minority or majority group. May I remind the reader that multiculturalism is for the enrichment of all people –not merely for individuals belonging to minority groups. As many scholars maintain, books that cover issues of ethnic diversity help minority children's point of view to be validated, while children from the majority group have the opportunity to be exposed to, learn about and appreciate different cultures (Bishop, 1987; Lamme et al., 2004; Lu, 1998; Vandergrift, 1993). In the 1980s, Bishop made an important point when she argued that children's literature has the opportunity to show kids "how we are connected to one another ... (how we can better) understand, appreciate and celebrate differences, (and...) can be used to develop an understanding of the effects of social issues and forces on (their) lives." (1987: 60). It is now four decades later, and we are faced with the same conundrum. How is ethnic diversity portrayed in children's textbooks?

Data & Methods

The purpose of this research is to examine the ethnic and/ or racial composition of main characters in Grades 1, 2 and 3 English textbooks and to compare these findings to BC's and Canada's ethnic diversity. By doing this we can establish whether or not ethnic diversity is accurately (proportionately) being portrayed in these primary textbooks.

Data & Procedure

The data used in this study was created via a latent content analysis that focused on the ethnic and/ or racial background of characters in Grades 1, 2 and 3 English textbooks that are mandated by the BC Ministry of Education (2015). A total of 214 stories were analyzed.

Every five years the BC Ministry of Education establishes a curriculum task force comprised of members of the Education community (primarily teachers) that choose mandated and supplementary texts (textbooks, readers, and so forth) to be used in the BC school curriculum. For the purpose of this study I have focused solely on primary-level English textbooks and have examined the Cornerstones (published in 1999 by Gage Learning Corporation) and Collections (published by Prentice Hall Ginn in 1998) series –for Grades 1, 2 and 3. These two series comprise the two core English textbooks at the primary-level that teachers should choose from. These series are used in the primary English curriculum in many Canadian provinces.

The primary years are particularly informative for children, as they have only recently entered the school system. At the beginning of their formal education and this socialization process children are particularly malleable. For this reason I focus my evaluation on children's primary school textbooks. English textbooks are the focus of this study since English is the official provincial language –and consequentially it is the language used to teach in most BC schools.

Latent content analysis was used to code the race/ ethnicity of the characters (in addition to other variables such as sex, age, power and character development). Racial/ ethnic categories were open-ended and were determined by a combination of the character's physical features (such as hair colour and style), dress and written story cues.

Two researchers conducted content analysis on each of the 214 stories. As data collection was carried out, researchers met to discuss the emerging racial/ ethnic categories. When researchers disagreed in terms of the coding of particular characters' racial/ ethnic groups, discussion about specific characters ensued and coding was altered. Disagreement emerged on 10 characters. Consensus was reached on all but two characters. These characters were coded into a grouping: 'ethnic minority, but don't know' category.

Variables and Analyses

Ethnicity and/ or race of the main characters in each story within the textbooks were assessed. These findings are then compared to the actual ethnic diversity found in B.C. and Canada. Though a simple analysis, it is important to publish these findings since no Canadian research has been published on the topic to date.

While I had originally hoped to focus solely on the objective ethnicity of main characters, it became quickly evident that this was not possible due to the lack of pictorial and written reference to ethnicity. In some stories ethnicity could be quickly determined by viewing the main character's dress or background images. For example, the ethnicity of Aboriginal characters tended to be most clearly depicted through the illustration of background images and location. In addition, the text of

the story confirmed Aboriginal ethnicity with reference to various cultural activities

Table 1 Ethnicity of Main Characters

and visits to family members on the reserve. As addressed by MacCann & Woodward (1977) four decades ago, ethnicity is a difficult concept to measure in children's literature. While some stories provided clear reference to ethnicity (through physical features, clothing and background context), we had to draw on purely 'racial' categories for others. Yet still for other characters, they were found to be 'white washed' (having standard clothing and (Caucasian) physical features and merely colouring characters different skin colours). While these limitations may confound classification of characters, interestingly the problem itself is indicative of the very research question I am addressing.

Racial/ ethnic categories were developed based on the literature. Following Kurtz (1996) each picture was fully examined -not merely the character- in order to see ethnic/ cultural cues that may be provided in the background of each picture. Sandefur's & Moore's (2004) guidelines on examining appearance (observable race, name, clothing, hairstyle, weight) and language (language used by characters or narrator that indicates race/ ethnicity) were used to determine racial/ ethnic categories.

In stories where ethnicity could not be determined, visual and or written markers indicated the main character's ethnicity. In over half of the stories that had an ethnic minority main character, ethnicity could not be determined and 'racial' category was reported.

The number of ethnic minority main characters (stories with one or two main characters) are examined. While one could report the number of main, secondary, background or total ethnic minority characters, I opted to initially examine only main characters since they are the most significant characters; they have the most power in the story and they tend to have the most face time. Future research should expand more on character type: examining the ethnicity of main, secondary and background characters.

Raw frequencies and percentages are provided for the ethnicity of main characters in the stories that were examined. In addition, percentages of various ethnic minority groups in BC and Canada are also presented. This data was retrieved from Census Canada (2011). In addition, t-tests were conducted to determine if ethnic representation differed by publisher. Two ethnicity-based variables are also t-tested: the proportion of ethnic minority characters portrayed in each story and the proportion of ethnic minority groups portrayed in stories.

Results

Ethnicity of Main Characters

Of the 214 stories that were examined, 94 had one main character and 77 stories had 2 main characters. The remaining 43 stories had multiple main characters (three to five main characters) or no main character (the stories were in a group setting). One hundred seventy one stories had one or two main characters which represents 206 main characters. Table 1 shows the ethnic breakdown of these main characters.

	Number	%
Caucasian	125	60.6
African	18	8.7
Brown	19	9.2
Black-brown	4	1.9
Chinese Asian	13	6.3
Aboriginal	14	6.8
Latin	2	0.9
South Asian	1	0.4
Iraqi	1	0.4
Spanish	1	0.4
Not Caucasian, do not know	9	4.4
Total # Main Characters	206	100%

Sixty point six percent of main characters were Caucasian. The Caucasian category included characters that had 'white' skin, but also characters with Western and Northern European as well as Russian ethnic backgrounds (based on the text).

Nine point two percent of main characters were 'brown', 8.7% were African and 1.9% were 'brown black'. The category 'brown' was developed solely on skin colour. In this category a large majority of characters appeared to be somewhat 'American Hispanic', however this could not be adequately determined. This category of characters appeared to be 'white washed' –looking predominately like Caucasian characters, but with 'brown' skin colour. This category is separate from the Latin (0.9%) and Spanish (0.4%) categories, which were determined based on text. The African grouping developed based on the characters' dark black skin colour and from text. Some of these characters are African, while others might have been African American or African Canadian. The 'brown-black' category developed solely based on skin colour. These characters had noticeably darker skin than from the 'brown' category, though a lighter skin shade from the African grouping.

The Chinese Asian category represented 6.3% of main characters. These characters were categorized based on (black) hair colour, box haircut, and physical facial features in addition to the text. This category is distinguished from the South Asian category (0.4%), which represented one character from India (based on text). We could not differentiate characters based on specific 'Chinese' cultures (e.g., Vietnamese, Tibetan) since reference to specific cultures was not made in the illustrations nor text.

One Iraqi character was identified via text and represented 0.4% of the sample.

Aboriginal characters comprised 6.8% of main characters. This category developed based on text, but also from physical features, clothing, and background setting apparent in the pictures

The ethnic background of 4.4% (9 characters) characters could not be determined. Based on their skin colour and physical features they were apart of an underdetermined (miscellaneous) ethnic minority group.

It should be noted that when sorting characters based on racial/ ethnic grouping, there appeared to be a link between textual reference to ethnicity and a clearer depiction of the ethnic character. When the text made direct references to specific ethnic groups the illustration of characters was not only clearer, but more real to life (less cartoon looking). This was the case with some of the African characters and all Iraqi, Aboriginal, Latin and Spanish characters.

Ethnic Diversity in BC & Canada Compared to Textbook Results

Table 2 compares (the percentage) ethnic diversity in BC, Canada and the ethnic representation of main characters in the textbook analysis. The results find that the textbooks do not provide comparable ethnic diversity as found in the general population –be it BC or Canada.

In two instances –those with Latin American and Arab descent, the ethnic representation is close to that found in BC and Canada. In the remainder of the categories the textbook representation far exceeds or under represents the actual ethnic diversity of the population.

Table 2 Ethnic Diversity in British Columbia and Canada (Census, 2011) Compared to Main Character's Ethnicity in School Textbooks				
	British Columbia	Canada	Textbooks	
	%	%	%	Representation
Chinese	9.5	3.3	6.3	Under/ Over
South Asian	6.1	4	0.4	Under
Filipino	2.1	1.6	0.00	Under
Korean	1.2	0.6	0.00	Under
South East Asian	1	0.9	0.00	Under
Japanese	0.8	0.3	0.00	Under
West Asian	0.7	0.6	0.00	Under
Latin American	0.7	1.2	0.9	Similar
Black (African)	0.6	2.3	8.7	Over
Multiple Visible Minority	0.6	0.8	6.3*	Over
Arab (Iranian)	0.2	0.1	0.4	Similar
Aboriginal	4.6	3.8	6.8	Over
'Brown'	-	-	9.2	
Total	28.1	23.3	39	Over

Characters with Black and Aboriginal ethnic backgrounds are greatly over-represented in the textbooks. Compared to the Canadian population, Chinese characters are nearly two times over-represented, though when compared to the BC population they are under-represented. Black characters are highly over-represented in the stories: they are 14.5 times over-represented when compared to BC's population and nearly four times over-represented in comparison to the Canadian population. In fact, if we include characters with African ethnicity and Brown-Black racial features, this represents 10.6% of all main characters –which means that this group is about 18 times over-represented compared with B.C. demographics and five

times over-represented compared to Canadian demographics. Aboriginal characters are also over-represented, though minimally –about 1.5 times and two times over-represented compared to B.C. and Canadian demographics.

South Asians, Canada's largest growing ethnic group and B.C.'s largest ethnic group (Census 2011) are extremely under-represented. Only 0.4% of main characters had a South Asian ethnicity, though in B.C. this ethnic group represents 6.1% of the population (and 4.0% of the population in Canada. This is the most striking disparity noted in Table 5.

There were no identified Filipino, Korean, South East Asian, Japanese or West Asian characters depicted in the stories, though these groups do comprise a smaller (albeit existent) proportion of the ethnic composition of BC and Canada.

In some stories, the ethnicity of characters could not be established. Six point three percent of main characters were of a mixed, unknown ethnic minority status. In addition, 9.2% of characters were 'brown'. As stated previously, this brown category was not associated with a particular ethnicity. These characters tended to have Caucasian features with brown skin. This 'white washing' of characters is a noted problem in the US children's literature. A total of 15.5% of characters did not have a recognizable ethnicity.

Lastly, it was found that compared to Census, ethnic minorities in general were over-represented in the textbooks. Visible ethnic minorities comprised 39.4% of main characters in the stories, while ethnic minorities in BC represent 28.1% and 23.3% in Canada. On the surface this appears to be a positive 'multicultural' finding, however as I have illustrated: some groups that are predominant in BC or Canada were not represented at all while others are significantly under-represented, and in 15.5% of cases the character's ethnicity could not be determined.

Test of Differences in Ethnic Representations

T tests were conducted to determine if the number of ethnic minority characters and groups portrayed in stories differed between publishers. No significant between-publisher difference was noted when examining ethnic representation (1- the proportion of ethnic minority characters portrayed in each story or 2- the proportion of ethnic minority groups portrayed in stories). While the Collections series had only a slightly lower average proportion of ethnic minority characters (0.34 and 0.33 respectively) and groups (.40 and .41 respectively) that were displayed compared to the All About the Series stories these differences were not statistically significant. The results find that ethnic representation in these textbooks is a common problem, regardless of the publisher.

Limitations

Content analysis is a subjective means of collecting data. While two researchers conducted the latent content analyses and the racial/ ethnic categorizations made had a near 1.0 inter-rater reliability (100% match), categorization error could still exist. With this being said, the focus of this paper is not concerned with reporting specific percentages but rather reporting the gaping disparities between ethnic representation in textbooks and actual ethnic representation in the BC and Canadian

populations. Because of this focus, the influence of categorization error on results is minimized.

A key limitation in this study is the operationalization of 'ethnicity.' While I would have preferred to discuss true 'ethnic' disparities (i.e., examining character's subjective and objective cultural identity through text and illustration) this was not possible since the bulk of stories and their illustrations did not make ethnic reference. As such, ethnicity was coded based largely on physical traits (skin, eye, hair) and to a lesser extent on specific ethnic reference (in text or illustration). Again, while this is an important limitation to note it does not dismiss the fact that main characters in these stories are not representative of the diversity found in our student population.

Lastly, statistical tests comparing the textbook data with Census data could not be performed. As a result the statistical significance of the percent differences that I have identified can not be determined. In many cases, however, the percent differences are overwhelmingly large –suggesting that these differences are in fact significant.

Discussion

Prevalence of Ethnic Misrepresentation

As illustrated in the results, the ethnic representation of main characters found in primary level English textbooks that are used in BC is not representative of the BC nor Canadian populations. What was particularly surprising was the overwhelming lack of representation of South Asian main characters, given that they are the largest (in BC) and fastest growing ethnic group in both the province and the country. To further this, there were absolutely no main characters that were of Filipino, Korean, South East Asian, Japanese or West Asian ethnicities in any of the stories. Chinese main characters were under represented according to BC demographics, though over-represented when contrasted to Canadian demographics. Alternately, 'Black' and Aboriginal characters were over-represented. Characters with black skin were largely over-represented. In addition, ethnic minority characters whose ethnicity could not be determined comprised the bulk of main characters. I do not deem these characters to be bi-products of the 'melting pot,' but rather what is referred to as 'white washing': a resemblance of white characters physically, though depicted with brown skin. Prior to the 1970s, this was a recognized problem in American children's literature (Larrick, 1965). In fact, prior to the 1960s in the USA Mendoza and Reese (2001) explain that children who were not of European or European-American ancestry were not represented in children's literature. According to the findings I have provided, a similar problem plagues the current Canadian children's stories that I have reviewed. Over representation of certain ethnic minorities (i.e., Chinese and Aboriginal ethnicities in contrast to Canadian Census) was also noted. While most over-representations were not extreme, over-representation of ethnic minorities that compose our ethnic mosaic is a positive way of creating equality by practicing equitable representation. In other words, slight over-representations of ethnic minorities are needed to increase their face time (and therefore messages of 'importance,' 'inclusion' and 'power') in stories. By doing this authors, publishers and

the school system encourage a positive understanding of 'self' and 'other.' A large over-representation of 'Black' main characters existed in the stories, that was not compatible with BC's nor Canada's demographics. I purport that over representation is indicative of American and not Canadian ethnic or racial representation.

In her research on American children's literature in the 1960s, Larrick (1965) highlights the discrepancy between the percentage of African Americans in U.S. society (between 50% -70% in many states during the time) and the fact that only 6.7% of her sample (349 stories out of 5206 stories published in the USA between 1962-1964) were African American. These findings were viewed as appalling and helped to spur an ethnic focus in children's literature in the USA. The under representations reported in this study far supersede what Larrick uncovered only ten years after the American civil rights movement. It is incomprehensible to understand these misrepresentations in current Canadian children's literature, given that we have been a multicultural nation for nearly thirty years. These misrepresentations are not acceptable; they not only do an injustice to our children's education, socialization and ultimately their well-being, but also to our multicultural agenda and future development as a nation.

Institutional Racism: Racism by Omission

In Canada racism is a 'dirty' word. Despite the fact that various laws (i.e., Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982) and policies (i.e., Canadian Multicultural Act, 1988) have resocialized Canadian institutions and the people, thirty years cannot wipe clean generations of racist ideology. Based on media reports and conference dialog, there appears to be a general fear among the majority (Caucasian) group in discussing racism. Rather, racism is often viewed as something that (ethnic) minorities bring up, and it is a concept and social problem to be treaded lightly with. Politics abound in any discussion of racism, though we should not turn our backs to indicators of racism when they are revealed. The lack of ethnic representation that has been uncovered in this paper is indicative of a specific form of racism: institutional racism by omission. Many prefer not to engage in such dialog, however it is necessary to step forward and embrace the challenges of our time so that we can best socialize and educate our people and new generations (both children and adults) of Canadians.

"Racism refers to a relatively complex and organized set of ideas and ideals (ideology) that assert or imply natural superiority of one group over another in terms of entitlement and privileges, together with the power to put these beliefs into practice in a way that denies or excludes those who belong to a devalued category" (Fleras, 2010: 376). To further this, institutional racism is defined as "organizational policies, programs and practices that openly deny or inadvertently exclude minorities from full and equal participation" (Fleras, 2010; 374). Racism by omission is racism that occurs when racism goes unnoticed, thereby denying the existence of a racially derived issue. Results from this study illustrate that many ethnic minority groups are either severely under-represented or not represented at all as main characters in the stories. As main characters, children who are South Asian, Filipino, Korean, South East Asian, Japanese and West Asian are nearly or completely invisible in these texts –they are devalued and denied a voice. This is harmful for obvious reasons, though research finds that children internalize this exclusion and believe that they are invisible (Cruz-Janzen, 1997). Racism by omission is particularly troublesome since

many do not see its existence as it tends to be perpetually overlooked, especially in the case of institutional racism. As Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) contend, it is not just the exclusion or inclusion of people (of colour), but how such norms /other constitutions continue to perpetuate marginalized thinking which translates into, and furthers, racist practices” (277). While institutional racism may not be intentional –it has the same negative effects as racism by commission. Despite Canada’s good efforts to curb racism, it is manifest in one of our core institutions –the school system. Racism in any form is dangerous, it harms our childrens’ health and well-being (George & Bassani, 2013) and society; it needs to be challenged.

Primary School Stakeholders

The finds reported herein inevitably lead us to ask why or how such misrepresentation could occur. This question is particularly important since its very presence suggests that the issue of ethnic representation in our children’s textbooks has fallen through the proverbial cracks. The federal Canadian government spends billions (approximately 75 billion) of dollars per year on education (in Provincial transfers and federal programs). The lion’s share of this money goes into the kindergarten through grade 12 system. As a system that is directly financed by taxpayers, the answer to this question is in every Canadian’s interest since we rely on government offices and the education system to provide our children with a high level education.

There are at least four main stakeholders in primary education (Parents, Teachers & Schools, Publishers and the general Canadian public) that have the ability to influence school books. Future research should look to these groups for not only an understanding of why erroneous ethnic representation continues, but also for support to advocate change. The onus of primary education lies on all four of these groups, as they are intricately linked. While there are a variety of players and issues that collectively enable ethnic misrepresentation, I discuss only the most predominant below.

Parents

Parents are a key stakeholder in the school system, though they have relatively limited power in educational decision making. Parents may be involved in their child’s education in a variety of ways: from helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom or school, to sitting on provincial or school board committees, though as Carnoy, Elmore & Siskin (2013) address, parent participation varies based on several factors such as: region, school type, level of education, school district and individual parental attributes. A breath of research documents parent and family participation in American schools, though for families that belong to marginalized groups, their participation tends to vary (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). For Hornby & Lafaele (2011), they assert that trust between parents, teachers, the school and or the general school system influences parental involvement. For parents who feel that they are not in-group members of the school or classroom, they are less apt to even question the ‘professional’ decisions –such as textbook choices (Vincent, 1996).

It is currently unclear how social capital (development of trust and relationship) influences participation and the degree of parent-education system engagement in BC or more broadly schools. Research needs to examine parent-education engagement (at all levels). In doing so, we need to ask if differences in engagement exist between parents belonging to marginalized groups. This is particularly important since research finds that it is more difficult for members of a privileged group to not only recognize inequality, but also to understand or empathize with inequalities that they do not experience (Katz, 1978; Lawrence, 1998). Which parents are engaged with the education system and which are not? By examining this question we may better understand which parents feel they have a voice in their children's education, which may shed light on why ethnic misrepresentation exists in textbooks.

Teachers & Schools

Teachers are the front line adults in the education system, though they have little autonomy when it comes to purchasing textbooks. In B.C., regardless of whether teachers recognize (or do not recognize) problems with ethnic representation in the books, they do not have the authority or finance to order new textbooks. While teachers may request new (different) textbooks, these orders are the responsibility of the administrative staff and ultimately the management (principals). Since textbooks are typically provided to teachers, their choices tend to be limited. In addition, teachers' textbook choices are further limited since they should choose from the Ministry mandated texts. As suggested in this paper, both English textbook series have ethnic representation issues –and no significant difference was present between them in terms of representation. This leaves teachers with the option to supplement stories that showcase ethnic diversity in their classroom (for reading times –but not as core texts). While research (Bainbridge et al, 1999) and the vast array of teaching resources (e.g., Wardle, 2007) do suggest that many teachers try to use supplementary books and stories that are ethnically inclusive, the research that I have presented does not tell us what books or supplementary books teachers are using. Research is needed to learn what (text and other reading) books are actually being used, if teachers acknowledge ethnic representation issues and how teachers identify with the problem of limited and lack of ethnic representation.ⁱ This is a limitation of this research and needs to be addressed in future studies. In addition, when addressing these questions, it must also be determined how teachers navigate what 'ethnic' and 'ethnically inclusive' mean? From my experiences interviewing teachers and administrators the definition of 'ethnic' varies dramatically.

Publishers

While parents and teachers are focal stakeholders in the textbook discussion, publishers are in some ways at the root of the issue, since they are the frontline producers of textbooks. While one could argue that publishers are the direct underlying reason why ethnic representation is not accurately reflected in primary level English textbooks, this is not truly accurate and somewhat naïve.

As reported, the results of this research indicated that both publishers did not provide stories that reflect the ethnicities found amongst British Columbians nor Canadians. What we don't know however, is if these publishers offer any other stories or textbooks that (better) reflect our ethnic mosaic. In addition, we need to examine what stories other publishers offer? In answering these questions we will be in a better position to understand the role that publishers play in ethnic misrepresentation.

While these companies are responsible for publishing these particular texts, from an economic standpoint, they are a business that sells a good. As pointed out by Larrick (1965) some 55 years ago, while there are limited to no complaints and buyers for such books, publishers will continue to market and sell such textbooks. Have teachers, principals, and school officials asked for better ethnic representation in their textbooks? Do they recognize that a problem exists? Does this problem all come down to budgets? (It would cost millions of dollars to replace stories and textbooks that are ethnically representative of British Columbians.) Much can be said on this last point, as capitalism advocates the status quo; interestingly this is exactly what the current textbooks are teaching children.

Canadian Culture

There are three main aspects of Canadian culture (the last stake holder) that influence primary school textbooks in British Columbia: Americanization, Marginalization of Children in Society and Multiculturalism.

Americanization

Based on the stories that were examined in this paper, evidence suggests that more of an American ethnic representation is being portrayed. Recall, 8.7% of main characters were 'Black' –which is more inline with the US representation, as 11.3% of the US population according to Census Bureau (2008) is 'Black' or 'African American.' In addition, 9.2% of characters had 'brown' skin but no traceable ethnicity –which bares a resemblance to the 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' culture that is prevalent in the USA.

In regards to the over-representation of 'Black' main characters, it should be noted that in the Toronto region 8.5% of the population reported themselves as 'Black' in the 2011 Census (2011b). While this approximates the representation found in the textbooks, it is unlikely that the publishers intentionally tried to match ethnic representation of their stories with Toronto Census. None of the other ethnic groupings approximated Census in the Toronto region.

Canadian scholars have a long-standing concern with Americanization as the influence that the United States of America has had on Canada has been widely studied and debated (Collins, 1990; Hurting, 2002; Moffat, 1972). Though a unique Canadian culture exists, there is no question as to the influence that American media has had and continues to have on Canadian culture. Despite Federal agencies (such as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) legislating protectionist policies over media –American media (which includes books) is highly prevalent throughout the country. Future research needs to examine the

Americanization of Canadian (primary) textbooks. In doing so, the issue of 'Canadian content' needs to be explored and defined. In reviewing the stories for this research, a serendipitous finding was revealed: What was meant by 'Canadian content' varied in its definition –ranging from merely a Canadian author, to a beaver or Mounty sketched into the story, to an elaborate story of cultural festivals in various Canadian regions. Research also needs to explore to what extent Canadian content - protectionist policies- are being maintained and evaluated in children's textbooks.

Marginalization of Children

Children are a marginalized group in Canada, though this is not specific to Canada. Fellow child researchers and advocates define (Bagley & Young, 1988; Bassani, 2009; Carpenter, 1996; Corsaro, 2005) children as a marginalized group: they lack the power, the authority, and often the agency to deal with issues that affect them. As Corsaro (2005) maintains, "children are pushed to the margins of the social structure by more powerful adults" (2005: 5). As a result of marginalization many issues to do with children are left unexplored or at best are given minimal attention. Carpenter (1996) stated it best when she said "the fact that Canadian scholarship on children's lore is limited and more descriptive than analytical tends to reinforce perceptions within academe of children's culture as ephemeral, whereas the failure to publish it more widely reveals ignorance among the general populace of its significance and, most important here, its appeal for children and accordingly its potential to effect attitude change" (56). While Carpenter is discussing children's lore, and not Canadian children's textbooks or literature in general, the same arguments can be made since children and the culture surrounding childhood are marginalized there is widespread lack of knowledge in both academia and the general population concerning the current state of affairs of primary level textbooks (and most matters in which children are effected!).

We live in a society where children's (those under the age of 18 or 19 depending on jurisdiction) agency has continually been eroded. It is not shocking then that such an educational disservice has gone on for decades.

Multiculturalism

Canada is praised with being the first multicultural nation and is an international leader for those countries hoping to espouse official multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been officially instituted for almost 30 years yet ethnic minorities are marginalized, as evidenced by this research. Unfortunately, this paradox is not difficult to explain: while Canada embraces multiculturalism –there is no one completely accepted multicultural model (conservative, liberal or plural) or meaning (multiculturalism as: a fact, an ideology, a government policy, a set of practices and a critical discourse). Because there is no one 'correct' definition or complete understanding of multiculturalism confusion has abounded.

While it is not within the boundaries of this paper to discuss and debate the various multicultural models and agendas –many Canadian scholars would agree that such malleability has had, at times a negative influence on the education system and more specifically children's literature (Carpenter, 1996). Certainly, multiculturalism

has had an overarching positive influence on education in Canada but when trying to understand why ethnic representation is so misaligned we must recognize that the Multiculturalism Act does not have the legal weight to radically alter the (provincial) education systems in Canada. That is to say, The Act does not dictate to curriculum nor textbooks. Rather, it asserts cultural rights that Canadians are entitled to (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988); the Act does not seek to “implement” multiculturalism into the education systems, but rather to “encourage and assist institutions to project the multicultural reality of Canada in their activities” (CMA, 1988: 5(1)(a)). Due to the vary nature of the Act, it is difficult not only to enforce, but evaluate the degree to which multiculturalism is being employed in any given institution.

In response to why ethnicity is misrepresented in primary level English textbooks I have discussed four key interrelated stakeholders. The purpose was not to give an account but rather to provide a starting point and acknowledge that more information is needed before we can even come to the table to discuss the ‘why’.

Recommendations

Throughout the paper I have made a series of recommendations, though foremost what is most needed is more research that examines ethnic representations in Canadian children’s textbooks. While a great deal of American literature exists, research that focuses on other countries is miniscule at best and dated. Our current research focus should first be directed towards primary level textbooks, since this is the onset of a child’s formal learning career. At a basic level, research is needed that exams ethnic representation (in terms of proportions) of all Ministry mandated (primary) textbooks and readers, across all subject matters (Math, Science, and so forth). This should be viewed as the starting point in assessing the presence of institutional racism within textbooks. After issues of representation have been determined more detailed analyses that examine power differentials, such as - how characters are portrayed, who holds power in the stories, character development, and so forth are needed.

A few central recommendations can be directed specifically to two key stakeholders: The Ministry of Education and Teacher Programs. Both of these groups could make significant changes that would help to improve ethnic representation. It would be beneficial for the Ministry to have an external group of experts, such as an outside academic network or group of researchers that specialize in curriculum studies to recommend textbooks every time a Ministry review occurs. Currently, the review and recommendation of textbooks is left to an internal committee that is largely comprised of teachers. If an outside (objective, specialist) group were to recommend textbooks to the internal committee this would hopefully insure that more ethnic (and other, i.e. ability) inclusive textbooks were chosen, but it would be a cost saving measure in the long term since new books would be of a higher quality due to their inclusiveness. This might mean that teachers would not have to order as many supplemental books to make up for ethnic (and other) disparities. This in turn would free more teacher time, both in and outside of the classroom.

In November 2015 the BC Ministry of Education put forth curriculum changes that will be made to the K-12 education system in the province, starting in the 2016-

2017 school year. The Ministry has stated that the new curriculum is in response 'to the demanding world our students are entering. Transformation in curriculum will help teachers create learning environments that are both engaging and personalized for students.' (BC Ministry of Education, 2015b). It is difficult to know how these provincial changes will alter the use of books recommended by the Ministry. The message that comes across in the media and when discussing the matter with primary school teachers is that textbooks will be refrained from being used. Primary teachers have speculated that the provincial changes will have little impact on the primary curriculum. In due time this will need to be examined.

Teacher training needs to also be examined since it has the opportunity to educate future teachers in regards to ethnicity, culture and multiculturalism (and other marginalities). Similar to other provinces in Canada, B.C. teacher programs are not standardized. Certainly, each of the accredited programs share common requirements since individuals must apply to the College of Teachers to obtain teaching certification, however none of the programs (nor entry requirements) require students to take a class on ethnic diversity in the classroom. Such a class has much potential to educate new teachers specifically about textbook limitations and their students. It is not enough to assume that student-teachers know (based on program prerequisites) about and understand key issues surrounding culture, ethnicity and multiculturalism in Canada and their local area. If such knowledge was made clear from the outset for student teachers, they would be better equipped to teach in multicultural classrooms and better prepared to discuss such issues with future principals (the gatekeepers who make the final textbook ordering decisions) as well as publishers.

Conclusion

This latent content analysis of children's English textbooks has found considerable misrepresentation of ethnicity as compared to the BC and Canadian populations. Such vast errors should be taken seriously and are indicative of institutional racism by omission. While this form of racism tends not to be intentional, it can be equally harmful to children, whether they are ethnic minorities or not. Changes are needed; stories in children's textbooks must speak to all students and not marginalize students.

In Canada, a nation that espouses multiculturalism and anti-racist rhetoric, institutional racism in the education system needs to be assessed. This study has only examined three grade levels in one province, but I suspect that the same trends are prevalent across the nation. In this paper I have only spoken to the issue of voice – who is being represented. Future studies need to delve into issues of character agency and power. Initial ethnic by power and agency analyses of the main characters in the stories reported on this paper suggest a similar trend –that ethnic minorities have less power and agency.

The stories that have been reviewed are not without merit. Marginal over-representation of Chinese and Aboriginal main characters was detected. In order to encourage equality, such equitable ethnic representation is needed. Stories in

textbooks are called to reasonably over represent ethnic groups and characters that make up our Canadian and British Columbian mosaic.

Nearly fifty years ago Larrick (1965), in her revolutionary research on the all-white world of children's literature, stated that "white supremacy in children's literature will be abolished when authors, editors, publishers, and booksellers decide that they need not submit to bigots" (10). While I don't maintain that we are still in an age of white supremacy, the findings from this research have illustrated that the problems of misrepresentation and limited representation of ethnic groups in primary level English textbooks in BC bears a striking resemblance to the problems highlighted by Larrick over half a century ago. I hope that the reader will respond to my work –whether it be positive or negative. Dialogue is needed. Inequality is not inevitable--it is socially constructed. The needed changes are not inconceivable, but they will take time and energy from our academic community and key stakeholders: to do or support research and to advocate for change. Policy makers, publishers and teachers need to be informed. Schools will inevitably purchase books and we do not have a shortage of illustrators nor writers in Canada. Consequently, there is no reason why textbooks can not be published that are inclusive of all children (regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality, ability and so forth).

Awareness, and most importantly understanding, needs to be brought to government offices, the Ministry of Education, educational management, teachers, publishers and most especially parents. It is not enough to merely be aware of this problem--action is required. The ethnic misrepresentations displayed in the stories that I have reviewed speak to the shortcomings of multiculturalism in our country and the inequalities that exist within the education system itself: inequalities that privilege some groups over others. An equal, or even better yet, equitable representation of ethnic minorities is needed in children's primary textbooks. Until this happens, students will continue to be socialized with the image that some (ethnicities) people are privileged and should be privileged over others. They will continue to learn that the education system (and all those that work in the system) sees some people as 'invisible', as irrelevant or less important. Regardless of if students are Aboriginal, seventh generation Canadians or first generation Canadians from India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, or from any of a number of countries -is this the message that we want to give our children?

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ⁱ In the process of conducting the research for this manuscript I did attempt to collect this information from a sample of schools, however I was blocked by a key gate keeper.