

Transforming practice

Transforming lives through diverse children's literature

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Helen Adam



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In the spirit of reconciliation,
PETAA, the author and the editor
acknowledge the Traditional
Custodians of Country throughout
Australia and their connections to
land, sea and community.

We pay our respects to their Elders
past and present and extend that
respect to all Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples today.

Foreword



Dr Helen Adam, the author of this wonderful book, opens the first chapter with the line ‘I think I was destined to be a lover of children’s literature’. It is clear to me that she is that and much more – because this book is much more.

Let me share my own thoughts and experiences with books, with literature, with learning; for I, too, am a lover of books. In the mid-fifties, when I was born, child care was rare and generally something shared between neighbours. There was no such thing as early learning centres and even kindergartens were mostly about socialising young children. They were days before we understood the benefits of early learning, and especially the importance of reading to children essentially from the time they are born – if not before. In fact, they were days when people generally believed teaching and learning were the domain of schools and school teachers, and not something that generally happened before children were old enough to attend school.

That said, I know I was lucky – lucky to have parents who were teachers, lucky to always have a house full of books, lucky to have an encyclopaedia to draw on for assignments, lucky to have developed a love of learning and an appreciation of the role of books in that development. All these years later, among my most treasured possessions are the books I was given for special birthdays and as prizes for school achievements.

Books inspire whether we’re reading them for enjoyment or to learn new things. Whether works of fiction or fact, books can teach us tolerance as well as context. They do this best when they include us or others like us. Only then can books teach us difference and diversity; only then can they teach us about ourselves as well as others. Books also challenge our views and take us on journeys – socially, culturally, politically, historically, futuristically, emotionally. They cause us to think and that’s always a good thing.

As a teacher myself, books and reading were integral to each day. My students had their own reading time, accessing books from the school library as well as those I provided for the classroom reading corner. We also had class reading time when I would read to the students, sometimes only a chapter a day depending on the novel we were enjoying. I well recall their frustration when that time stopped in favour of the next lesson – more so, if I was so engrossed in the story that I’d silently skim over the next few pages so I knew what was coming even if they didn’t.

I still read at least a chapter from my current tome every day and I regularly think about the adage that when you watch a movie, your imagination is limited by what the movie-maker presents, but when you read a book, there is no limit to where your imagination can take you.

Books matter. This book matters!

Emeritus Professor Colleen Hayward AM

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge that this book was written on the lands of the Whadjuk Nyungar people. I also acknowledge that it will be read on many traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands of this country we now call Australia. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging across all the traditional lands on this continent. I recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been educating children on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

Since this book was first conceived, I have been strongly supported by many people. Here I especially wish to thank Whadjuk Nyungar colleague Libby Jackson-Barrett, Martu colleague Associate Professor Robert (Bob) Somerville AM, and Nyungar Wardandi colleague Professor Braden Hill Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Indigenous) and Head of Kurongkurl Katitjin, at Edith Cowan University's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research. The support, good humour and patience of these colleagues are immense, and I am so very grateful to work alongside them. I also wish to acknowledge and thank Sharon Davis, a proud Bardi Kija woman and Director of Education and Ethics at AIATSIS.

I greatly appreciate and value Sharon's interest in this project and her warm and generous advice. I am grateful to Emeritus Professor Colleen Hayward, a former colleague and senior member of the Noongar people, for generously agreeing to write the foreword, and to Dub Leffler, descendant from the Bigambul people of south-west Queensland, for the amazing illustration on the cover of this book. I also acknowledge my colleagues and leadership in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University; I work alongside many passionate and committed educators every day and gain energy and inspiration from them.

I am also humbled and proud to have the work of my international colleagues included in this book. It was the work of both Distinguished Professor Gloria Boutte and Professor Mariana Souto-Manning that first opened my eyes and inspired me in my work about 10 years ago. Their work is seminal to my own research and I am honoured to have them both as contributors to this book, along with Mariana's colleague Gina Marcel, who has her own strong track record in the field of diversity and equity. Adjunct Associate Professor Laurie (Laura) Harper and I connected several years ago and have worked on several joint publications together and her contribution to this book is greatly valued. Associate Professor Nicola Daly examined my doctoral thesis and we have shared many passionate conversations since then. Professor Kathy Short is an international giant in the field of children's literature and has worked closely with her colleague Dr Dorea Kleker on many publications. To have their collaborative work included in this book is an honour indeed.

This book could not have been written without the support of the board of PETAA and, in particular, Megan Edwards (General Manager – PETAA) and Barbara Delissen (editor). Their patience, advice and constant support is immeasurable.

To the readers of this book, the educators who go above and beyond for young Australians every day, I pay tribute to you and thank you. I hope this book supports you in your work.

I thank my Mum who instilled a love of literature and my Dad (gone from us this year) who instilled a passion for justice. Lastly, to my partner Vince, my six beautiful children, their partners and my grandchildren: you are my life and my reason for being. Your support and pride for all I do cannot be understated and I hope my work contributes to a brighter world for your children to live in.

Helen Adam



Online resources

Go to <https://bit.ly/PET128extras> for extra resources, as indicated throughout the book.

About the guest authors

Chapter 7

Elizabeth (Libby) Jackson-Barrett is a Whadjuk Noongar woman. With 20 years' experience in education, Libby is a senior Indigenous lecturer/researcher for Kurongkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research and the School of Education, Edith Cowan University. Libby's research interests include exploring factors that promote and develop successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in education.

Chapter 8

Mariana Souto-Manning, PhD, is president of the Erikson Institute in Chicago. Mariana served as Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and held academic appointments at the University of Iceland and King's College London. Committed to justice in early childhood teaching and teacher education, her research centres on intersectionally minoritised communities of Colour.

Gina Marcel is an academic technologist at The School at Columbia University. As a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, her research centres on where joy lives in education. In 20+ years, Gina has served in roles ranging from teacher to administrator and worked extensively with NYSAIS and NAIS.

Chapter 9

Dr Gloria Boutte is a Carolina Distinguished Professor at the University of South Carolina. She is the author/editor of five books and nearly 100 publications. She is a Fulbright Alum and recipient of both the 2020 National Council of Teachers of English Outstanding Educator in the English Language Arts – Elementary Section and the American Educational Research Association 2021 Division K Legacy award.

Chapter 10

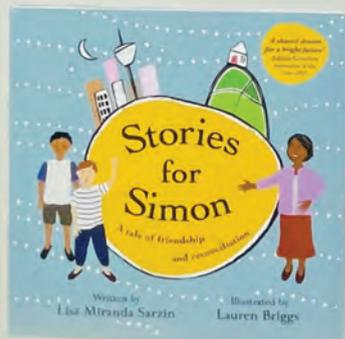
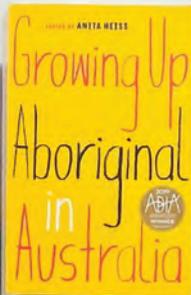
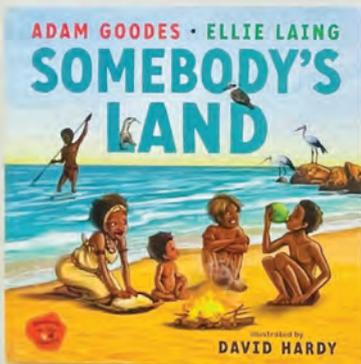
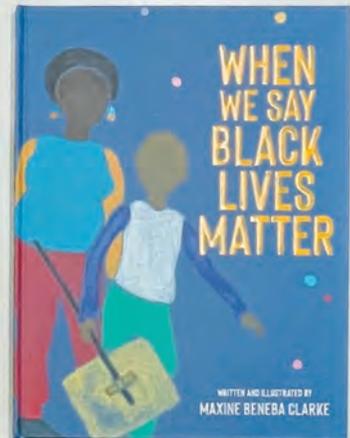
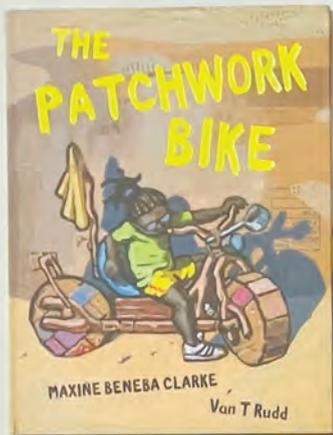
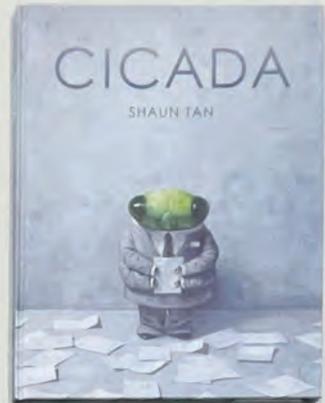
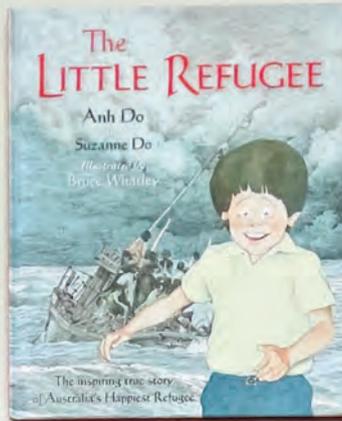
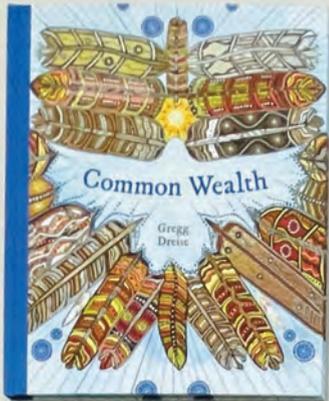
Nicola Daly is a sociolinguist and Associate Professor in the Division of Education at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, where she teaches courses in children's literature. Her research focus is multilingual picture books and she was a Fulbright New Zealand Scholar in 2019/2020.

Kathy G Short is a Professor and endowed chair of global children's literature in the College of Education at the University of Arizona, where she is director of Worlds of Words: Center of Global Literacies and Literatures (wowlit.org). She has co-authored books and articles on inquiry, literature, and inquiry as curriculum.

Dorea Kleker is an early childhood teacher educator and lecturer in the College of Education at the University of Arizona. Her work in the US and Latin America focuses on global and multicultural children's literature, literacy and play to develop intercultural understanding, and the use of literature to actively engage children as inquirers across all content areas.

Chapter 11

Laurie Harper is a US-based adjunct Associate Professor with Edith Cowan University. Over the past decade, she has published a body of scholarly work on selection, evaluation and use of children's literature, combined with developmentally appropriate teaching strategies supporting children's multicultural awareness and sensitivity, socio-emotional development and early literacy.



Chapter 1

Introduction: Why this book?

Introduction

I think I was destined to be a lover of children's literature. With a grandmother who had been a pioneering teacher in Western Australia and parents who were both avid readers themselves, books were a central part of my childhood and that of my five siblings. My mother read to us from birth and often multiple times a day when we were little. Whenever it was time for her to sit down and feed whoever was the baby at the time, the rest would gather round and mum would read and read and read. Once we were at school, there was never an evening when she did not read at least two books before bedtime – one story or chapter and one bible story. Occasionally my Dad would take over and this was always a real treat – I will never forget his silly voices for the muddle-headed wombat or the precious experience that reading time was for our family. Once we could read for ourselves, we older siblings would still love to listen to Mum (or Dad) reading to the younger children, then off to bed we would go to our reading lamps and our treasured reading-in-bed routine. Books like *Blinky Bill*, *Snugglypot and Cuddlepie*, *The muddle-headed wombat*, *The Secret Seven* and *The Famous Five* launched me into a love of books and the worlds I could inhabit through them. Close friends from my school days still poke fun at me for being the bookworm of the class.

As a mother of six myself, I continued this practice with my own children and am now seeing this passed on to my ever-increasing brood of grandchildren (seven and counting). It is not uncommon for me to be reading to the 'grandies' and to look up and see their parents, aunts and uncles listening avidly to the story too. There is nothing quite like the magic of listening to a story!

Books in my professional life

Over my many years of classroom teaching, daily read-alouds by myself and designated independent reading time for my students were central to my classroom routine. From time to time, former students contact me and it is always their memories of book sharing that they recall most fondly. One former student, Kate Hedley, was editor of a community newspaper, the *Mandurah Mail*, at the time her daughter started school. Kate published an editorial in which she reminisced about her own school days:

But it was books that became my first true love. And for this, I have Miss Adam to thank. Of all the things I remember learning during primary school, it was reading and writing in her class that I recall most fondly. She brought stories to life and fostered a lifelong appreciation of the written word that has never left me. Miss Adam's influence could well be a major reason I chose to write for a living.

As an academic, this touching quote is something I invoke when working with preservice teachers to remind them of the often unknown impact they can have on the learning and

lives of their students. Central to this, though, is the impact of the books themselves, and the light, fire, passion and knowledge they inspire in young people like Kate.

Books for all children – Finding missing links

Early in my academic career I was fortuitously asked to take over coordinating and teaching a unit on children's literature in the classroom – talk about my dream job! I began my first foray into reading research into children's literature and found a wealth of evidence supporting what I knew to be the essence of much of my own reading journey, my love of literature, my knowledge and understandings of the world and my own academic success. Books matter! Books matter not just as tools to teach children how to read and write, but they matter in the development of the individual child. The words of the eminent Maurice Saxby really capture the magic and importance of literature in the life of a child:

Literature entertains. It allows, too, for the re-creation of thoughts, sensations, dreams, feelings, fears, aspirations. It causes awe and wonder. It can bring joy. It can set off reverberations that are echoes of far-off, distant insights from times past. It can propel the reader into a more secure future as self-awareness and understanding is nourished and grows. Literature is life, illuminated and sweetened by the artist. (Saxby 1997:35)

It was this work, and the inspiration of scholars like Saxby, which began my journey as a researcher with a focus on the importance of books in the life of a child. Over the years I have read, researched, written and presented to numerous academic and professional groups about the importance of reading to, with and by children. Through this work, two significant concerns have come to light, both of which have considerable implications for not only the academic outcomes for children, but also their social and emotional outcomes. In fact, these have implications for our society as a whole.

The first concern is an apparent reduction in the amount of time adults read to children in educational settings, combined with a drop in the general rate of reading for pleasure among children and adolescents.

The second key concern driving my work emerged in 2009, when my eyes were opened to a glaring omission in children's books. I was writing a chapter on children's literature (Adam 2011) for an early childhood literacy textbook. At the time, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF; DEEWR 2009) and the Australian Curriculum (2010) were in their infancy and the authors of the new text asked me incorporate references to these in the chapter.

As I began to examine these documents, I found that underlying both the EYLF and Australian Curriculum is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which explicitly states that:

all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. (DEEWR 2009:4)

As I explored the EYLF principles and outcomes, and then the Australian Curriculum, I was hit with a revelation that the books I had grown up with, shared with my own children, populated my shelves with and used as the basis of my recommended reading lists for teachers and parents were exclusive: dominated by white, middle-class, predominantly male, heterosexual heroes, lifestyles and viewpoints.

I began to seek out studies into the impact of literature on children from diverse backgrounds, and my life, my reading and my work has never been the same. This propelled me into my doctoral studies and beyond.

Our diverse society and classrooms

In Australia there are over 500 Aboriginal nations with over 200 language groups and 800 dialects (AIATSIS 2021) and we live in a time where Australians come from more than 200 countries, speak over 300 distinct languages and belong to more than 100 different religious groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). For all children to achieve the benefits that come with sharing and reading literature, all children need to see themselves, as well as those different to them, reflected in books. All children need time to read and to be read books that resonate with them. All children need to linger with stories that, in Saxby's words, 'can propel the reader into a more secure future as self-awareness and understanding is nourished and grows'.

One of the greatest challenges facing 21st-century educators in Australia is that of the diverse nature of our classrooms. Very often the children considered to be at greatest risk of poor academic outcomes are those from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds (see 'Important notes' at the conclusion of this chapter). These same children are often those whose own lives, backgrounds and communities are invisible in the resources used in our schools. This issue of invisibility impacts considerably on these children's chances of academic success and social and emotional strength. A curriculum that is underpinned by diverse and inclusive literature can help educators create more inclusive and equitable classrooms, which can only have benefits for all.

In this era of high stakes accountability, teachers need clear evidence and supportive strategies to build inclusive, successful classrooms without adding further layers of complexity to their daily workloads.

About this book

In this book I share evidence and insight from my own doctoral studies and the work of many other scholars that can help educators find ways to extend and transform their practice. In doing so, educators can help achieve equitable outcomes for all children and help create citizens with a strong sense of identity, social justice and sense of place in the world.

Some sections of this book are drawn directly or in part from my thesis (Adam 2019a). Some information is reproduced under creative commons from my articles for *The Conversation* (Adam 2019b, 2020).

This book is structured into five distinct parts, each with its own flavour and focus.

Part 1: Reading to, with and by children

In Part 1, I explore the importance of adults sharing books with children and giving children access to books they can select and read for themselves. I examine the academic and intellectual benefits of reading and then look at the sometimes overlooked social and emotional benefits. Next, I look at the importance of nurturing children who not only can read but who *want* to read and *love* to read. Following this I explore the importance of diverse books and show why these matter if we want all children to achieve equitable outcomes and benefits from reading and book sharing.

Part 2: Diverse classrooms and diverse books

In Part 2, I draw on parts of my doctoral dissertation, adopting a more critical viewpoint by exploring worldwide research, including my own, on the nature of diversity and education for all.

Chapter 3 examines what diversity means, how it is articulated in our current educational policies and what this means for educators. I touch on some of the political considerations faced by policy makers and educators in this space. The chapter then explores the development of race and culture as children develop their identity and world views. Chapter 3 looks at the place of literature in supporting children's developing sense of identity, and understandings of themselves and others.

In Chapter 4, I move into the sometimes discomfiting sphere of educators' beliefs and understandings. This chapter investigates what research tells us about some of the prevailing perceptions and assumptions about children from underrepresented backgrounds, and how these can lead to differing expectations for these children, or to an unwitting overlooking of ways to create more inclusive learning environments. The chapter then examines how these beliefs can play out in book selection and sharing. Finally, Chapter 4 looks at ways in which educators can assess their own assumptions and learning environments and take steps to transform these for the benefit of all.

Part 3: Curriculum and practice

In Part 3, I move into the practical application of literature within and across the curriculum, and the ways in which diverse literature can be infused into the curriculum through informed selection and culturally responsive practice.

In Chapter 5, I present research-informed tools for assessing and selecting diverse literature, as well as ways to encourage critical conversations with children to promote inclusivity, openness and deeper understandings of how literature constructs and reflects ways of being and thinking. These include the tools I developed and used in my doctoral studies.

Chapter 6 examines how diverse literature can support the Australian Curriculum and the EYLF, making links to specific curriculum areas, strands and substrands. The chapter then looks at how to use diverse texts through culturally responsive practice.

Chapter 7 is written by Whadjuk Noongar colleague Libby Jackson-Barrett. This chapter takes you on a journey of discovery of the historic nature of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as their long-term invisibility and misrepresentation in the curriculum. The chapter explores how Australia's existing education system can re-imagine the use of Aboriginal literature in its curriculum through culturally responsive pedagogy in order to share authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, experiences and stories.

Part 4: Successes and challenges from the field

In Part 4, I present four guest chapters written by world experts in the field of diverse children's literature. This part of the book gives important insights into the international nature of the importance of diverse books for all children. These chapters provide background, contexts and strategies that are as transferable and relevant to Australia as they are to the countries in which they were produced.

Chapter 8 is authored by Mariana Souto-Manning (president of the Erikson Institute in Chicago, USA) and Gina Marcel (doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, USA). This chapter explores the history and continued inequities in the portrayal of People of Colour in children's books in the US. Souto-Manning and Marcel (re)position children's books by and about Persons of Colour as sites for microaffirmations and the cultivation of 'Black joy'. While this chapter focuses on the context of People of Colour in the USA,

there are strong parallels to the invisibility and misrepresentation of People of Colour in Australia, and to the importance of all children seeing themselves reflected in joyful and contemporary books.

Chapter 9 is authored by Gloria Boutte (University of South Carolina, USA). This chapter explores the importance of teaching about Black people's histories, cultures, world views, languages and humanity from nondeficit perspectives. African Diaspora Literacy (being literate about the history of African diasporic people) is explained. An emphasis on African American agency and resistance is presented as a common theme for teaching about African Diaspora Literacy, using works of fiction and nonfiction. As with Chapter 10, readers will see parallels between the importance of nondeficit approaches to the education of children from historically marginalised backgrounds in Australia as presented throughout this book.

Chapter 10 is written by Nicola Daly (University of Waikato, NZ), Kathy Short (University of Arizona, USA) and Dorea Kleker (University of Arizona, USA). They present strategies for using dual language picturebooks in the classroom, based on a six-week after-school program for 9- to 11-year-old children in Arizona, USA. The chapter describes how children responded to the use of picturebooks featuring the language of their education (English) and a second language, ranging from the familiar (Spanish) to languages they had no knowledge of (Māori). The chapter outlines how the different approaches for using dual language picturebooks with children may support children's development of language awareness.

Chapter 11 is authored by Laurie Harper, a USA-based colleague in an adjunct role with Edith Cowan University (Western Australia). This chapter takes a change of focus from race and culture to that of gender diversity. It explores how stereotypical portrayals of males and females and the underrepresentation of female characters in children's literature can contribute negatively to children's development. Harper presents a framework to assist educators to evaluate books for gender representation.

Part 5: Conclusion

Part 5 draws together the key messages of this book and supports educators with recommendations for accessing a range of diverse books. It concludes with a message of hope and excitement for the contribution we, as educators, can make to the future educational outcomes and societal viewpoints of the children in our care.

Important notes

Throughout this book I have used the term *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* to refer to the first peoples of Australia. I recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenous group and that there are many unique and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia.

In writing this book, I have consulted numerous colleagues as well as multiple inclusive language guides in my efforts to ensure the language I use positions all people and groups of people in equitable ways. Across the many research fields encompassing diversity, many terms are used to attempt to describe those who are discriminated against, minoritised or marginalised. These include *minority groups*, *minoritised groups*, *marginalised groups*, *People of Colour*, *BIPOC* (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour), and those who are *historically excluded*, *underrepresented* and *underserved*. Each has its supporters and critics. I acknowledge this dilemma and the challenge of choosing a term that does not position any people or groups in a deficit light. In this book, due to the focus on the representation of diverse groups in children's literature I attempt to consistently use the term *underrepresented* (people or groups).

In this book the terms 'book sharing' and 'read-alouds' are used interchangeably to refer to the classroom practice of educators reading books to and sharing books with children.

I use the term 'educators' to encompass all those who work, teach and share books with children.

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