



An Exploration of the Extent Contemporary Children's Picture Books in Ireland Reflect the Perspective of Critical Multiculturalism.

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11th May 2020

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

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10/05/20

Wordcount: 10,971

Abstract

This documentary analysis examines picture books available in Ireland through the lens of critical multiculturalism. Since 2003 the scale of immigration into Ireland has foregrounded issues of cultural diversity (Parker-Jenkins, 2013). The multicultural classroom brings forth new challenges and considerations for primary schools, including the availability of multicultural literature. According to Hinton and Dickinson (2007) multicultural literature instils pride and a sense of self-empowerment in readers, additionally it can be utilised as a means of combatting racism and other such prejudices, as it encourages and promotes empathy. Multicultural literature allows children to see themselves in the books they read and also to see the world through another's eyes (Atkinson Smolen & A., 2011).

Using the principles of grounded theory, open coding and axial coding were utilised to analyse a sample of 20 books from the Inis Reading Guide 2018. The extent to which the books were representative of a critical multicultural perspective was greatly varied. The findings highlighted that there were multidimensional representation of minority peoples and cultures presented in several books, and others portrayed these characters in a tokenistic manner. The research reveals how the children's literature landscape in Ireland is changing and transforming. The findings highlight a movement towards a more inclusive environment, however, there remains a need for further subversive children's literature to become more widespread. The literature coded was deemed to be the "very best" of children's literature (Children's Books Ireland, 2018). Thus, it cannot be said to be representative of most children's literature available. Instead, it highlights that even the high-quality literature still has strides to make towards a critical multicultural perspective.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my eternal gratitude to my loving mother, Aideen, father, Liam and sister, Caoileann. Thank you for all of your love, support and kindness (and the cups of tea) throughout my life and particularly during my time at Marino Institute of Education and the duration of the completion of this dissertation. Without your love, guidance and support I would not be where I am today.

To my supervisor Colleen Horn, thank you so much for all your help and guidance during this process. Your support and encouragement are greatly appreciated.

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Introduction

Context

Ireland has traditionally been characterised as “Catholic, White and Gaelic” (Torvey & Share, 2003, p. 343). This cultural norm has been disestablished in recent years with the introduction of new expressions of race, culture and religion into the state. Since 2003 the scale of immigration into Ireland has foregrounded issues of cultural diversity (Parker-Jenkins, 2013). Demographic data from the 2016 census reveal the shifting nature of cultural diversity in Ireland; 17.3 per cent of Irish residents were born outside Ireland and the proportion of the population who are non-Irish nationals was recorded as 11.6 percent (CSO, 2016). The changing nature of the Irish population has resulted in a transformed classroom space, wherein cultural diversity is becoming the norm.

Importance of the Research

The multicultural classroom brings forth new challenges and considerations for primary schools. One important concern is the inclusion of multicultural literature within classroom libraries. Multicultural literature is powerful in its ability to transform our understandings of both ourselves and others. According to Hinton and Dickinson (2007) multicultural literature instils pride and a sense of self-empowerment in readers, additionally it can be utilised as a means of combatting racism and other such prejudices, as it encourages and promotes empathy. Multicultural literature allows children to see themselves in the books they read and also to see the world through another's eyes (Atkinson Smolen & A., 2011). Pupils who do not see their culture reflected or represented in the literature they read may develop a belief that they have little value or importance in school or society (Hinton & Dickinson, 2007). Consequently, they may lose interest in school and their academic performance may suffer (Hinton & Berry, 2004).

Despite the benefits and importance of including multicultural children's literature within the classroom, the ongoing lack of diversity in children's books has been documented over the past 75 years internationally (Crisp, et al., 2016). This issue is of increasing importance to a progressively diverse Irish state. A content analysis of the books which are present in the contemporary Irish framework should be undertaken in order to ascertain the extent to which the children's literature present is reflective of the transformed Irish societal landscape. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine the multicultural literature that is present and to consider how it presents a pluralistic society. It is essential to understand whether the multicultural books that Irish children are exposed to are grounded in critical multicultural theory or are reinforcing existing power dynamics which serve the majority culture.

Focus and Scope

The research aims to uncover the extent to which contemporary children's picture books available in Ireland reflect a multicultural society in line with the ideals of critical multiculturalism (Bradford, 2011). The research will analyse picture books to uncover whether they present different cultures, peoples and minorities, and the extent to which they do so in a manner which challenges traditional power imbalances, by foregrounding the perspectives of the minority characters and avoiding exoticizing or Othering them. The research will focus on children's picture books which are classified as high-quality literature. To that end, the Inis guide 2018 will provide the sample. This will allow the research to uncover to what extent multicultural literature is available in Ireland.

Questions and Objectives

The research aims to explore the extent to which contemporary children's picture books in Ireland reflect the perspective of critical multiculturalism. To that end the researcher asked the following questions to meet this key objective:

- To what extent is Ireland's "rhetoric of interculturalism" (as coined by Bryan, 2010) without meaningful steps toward integration reflected in the literature?
- Does the children's literature target power imbalances within society and destabilise them, or does it further reinforce them?
- Is the literature inclusive of minority children and does it present them a positive self-image of their culture?
- Is the literature representative of all minority groups (equally and to what extent)?
- Are the children's books readily available and accessible?

Personal Motivation

The fabric of Irish society is undergoing vast transformation. Consequently, the Irish classroom is becoming more diverse and multicultural. Irish educators are becoming conscious of the diversity in their classrooms, and debates and discussions arise as to how best to accommodate and integrate pupils and families of different cultures and beliefs into the classroom and the wider community.

This conversation has not yet expanded into the realm of children's literature in the classroom (as shown by the Literature Review). The result is that the extent to which the children's literature is reflective of multicultural Ireland is widely unknown and perhaps not a primary concern of Irish teachers. The aim of this research is to ascertain the level of multicultural diversity in picture books in contemporary Ireland. As a future primary school teacher this is a critical concern for me personally as I endeavour to create a classroom which is inclusive of all its pupils.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the relevance of this research. It explained how it applies to the contemporary Irish context as a relatively new issue. It explicated the importance of multicultural literature to the children reading it and the need for such research to be

undertaken. The chapter briefly outlined the focus and objectives of the research, though both issues will be explored in greater depth in the Literature Review and Methodology chapters. Finally, the researcher's own personal motivation was delineated.

The following chapters will trace the process of the research. The Literature Review will discuss the current state of literature surrounding critical multiculturalism and how it can be related to children's literature. The Methodology will outline the research methods used to analyse the children's literature. The findings of this research will be delineated and discussed in relation to the literature in the Findings and Discussion chapter. Finally, the Conclusion chapter will summarise the results of the study and the extent to which the research questions were answered.

Literature Review

Introduction

To undertake this research, an understanding of the current literature pertaining to multiculturalism and its relationship to children's literature was necessary. Theories around multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism were identified and examined, leading to the decision for this research to be grounded in critical multiculturalism. The relationship between critical multiculturalism and children's literature was also analysed, as well as previous studies pertaining to the availability of multicultural children's literature. This chapter grounds the current literature within the wider context of theoretical background and relevant research.

Theoretical Background

Defining the cultural, the multicultural and multiculturalism. Culture refers to the shared characteristics that impact upon the way a person lives, thinks and creates meaning (Campbell Naidoo, 2014). Culture encompasses the daily experiences of a community, region or nation (Nieto, 1999). As culture forms such an intrinsic part of identity, it can influence a child's self-esteem by the way society perceives their cultural group (Campbell Naidoo, 2014). Indeed, a 2001 study demonstrated that negative stereotypes significantly impeded the cognitive performance of children in elementary and middle schools in the United States (Ambady, Shih, Kim, & Pittinsky, 2001).

Multicultural involves the intersection of more than one culture. It is a difficult concept to define as it is both an ideological and normative concept; additionally it is a demographic fact (Bradford, 2011). Its definition is made more complex by attempting to determine the parameters of the prefix 'multi' (Cai, 2002). Arguably, multicultural can be defined as the inclusion of multiple cultures, encompassing both underrepresented and mainstream cultures. Its meaning can be aligned to that of "cultural pluralism", the view that

modern national cultures are comprised of ethno-specific cultures, regional and generational subcultures (Pakulski, 2014, p. 25).

Multiculturalism was conceived as a response to the increased cultural pluralism present in societies. It is an approach which attempts to deal with cultural difference by ensuring their recognition (Wieviorka, 2012). Multiculturalism is a policy discourse which encourages people to both acknowledge and embrace cultural diversity (Tasan-Kok, van Kempen, Raco, & Bolt, 2013). Multiculturalism advocates cultural diversity and heterogeneity and promotes tolerance (Gozdecka, Ercan, & Kmak, 2014). Ultimately, this definition of multiculturalism promotes a feel-good notion of cultural pluralism which ignores the power structures that dominate the global world.

Critical multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism problematises the shortcomings of traditional multiculturalism (Bradford, 2011). Through this lens traditional multiculturalism is perceived as being depoliticised in nature, whilst promoting tolerance towards cultural diversity (Bradford, 2011). The tolerance is generally attributed to the cultural majorities who sustain self-serving hierarchies, where their dominance is maintained over minority cultures (Bradford, 2011). Ireland has been criticised for professing this form of multiculturalism. Audrey Bryan (2010) argued that within the Irish context the “rhetoric of interculturalism” gives the suggestion that Ireland is developing towards a more inclusive state and is responding to racism through its institutions, whilst systematically reinforcing power inequities between minority and majority groups (p.225). Bryan maintains that this approach to multiculturalism reinforces a power dynamic whereby the ethnic majority determines the value of incoming ethnic minorities based on their ability to contribute to the host culture.

Critical multiculturalism combines theories such as antiracist education, critical race theory, and critical pedagogy to offer a more comprehensive analysis of oppression and the institutionalisation of unequal power relations (May & Sleeter, 2010). The first criticisms of multiculturalism arose from antiracist theorists (Kirova, 2008). These theorists emphasise traditional multiculturalism's disregard of racial discrimination and its failure to confront those institutions which uphold it (Brandt, 1986). Critical race theorists lament traditional multiculturalism's failure to interrogate difference and offer an alternative to the current social order, as first vocalised by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). Traditional multiculturalism was critiqued by critical pedagogy for its tendency to conceptualise culture as static and one-dimensional (May & Sleeter, 2010). This reductive view of culture can lead to the practice of multiculturalism being characterised by the "folklorisation" of cultures which are seen as Other (Kirova, 2008, p. 107). Critical pedagogy claims that because this focus occurs without the support of a transformative political agenda, its only purpose is to reinforce the dominant Western ideology protecting existing inequalities. Critical multiculturalism arose from these critiques and attempts to succeed in these areas that traditional multiculturalism could not.

Critical multiculturalism seeks to address the power imbalances which exist within a pluralistic society. Its approach deals with the transforming understanding of issues such as culture, power and identity. It merges both cultural and structural concerns, advocating for a pluralistic society in which cultural diversity is recognised and celebrated whilst addressing the existing unequal power structures that permeate society (May, 2009). By acknowledging the criticisms put forth by antiracism theorists, critical race theory and critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism provides a deeper understanding of oppression and the institutionalisation of unequal power dynamics within society (May & Sleeter, 2010). Where its predecessor, traditional multiculturalism, viewed the misunderstanding of difference as the

very root of conflict, critical multiculturalism focuses on the inequitable power relations that permeate society. Learning should now focus on the ability to identify and analyse the “political and ideological underpinnings of inequality” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). Critical multiculturalism calls for profound analyses of the institutionalised systems of oppression which pervade society (Banks, 2006).

Critical pedagogy criticised traditional multiculturalism's reductive definition of culture (Kirova, 2008). Critical multiculturalism overcomes this criticism through a transformed approach to culture. Within this paradigm, culture is drawn from conceptualisations in both cultural studies and critical anthropology (Kirova, 2008). Rather than being static and one-dimensional, culture is understood in critical multiculturalism to be both historical and dynamic, meaning that it has the ability to reform itself (Kirova, 2008). This understanding of culture and identity is fluid and complex, allowing for it to be “continually reconstructed through participation in social circles” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10).

Critical multiculturalism is thus an approach to cultural pluralism which recognises the shortcomings of traditional multiculturalism and overcomes them. Through the lens of critical multiculturalism our understandings of the nature of conflict are transformed from that of misunderstanding of difference to interrogation of existing power inequities and the institutions which uphold them. This has the additional impact of reconceptualising culture from a static representation of the Other, to a fluid and complex understanding of identity, which bypasses tokenism and folklorisation in favour of culture as being continuously reconstructed.

Multicultural Children's Literature

Towards a definition. Given that the definition of multiculturalism is itself a contentious term, it follows that multicultural literature is equally complex to define. Harris

and Hodges (1995, as cited in Atkinson Smolen & Oswald, 2011) define multicultural literature as “writing that reflects the customs, beliefs, and experiences of people of differing nationalities and races” (p. 158). Other definitions are more inclusive, embracing religious beliefs, gender issues, sexual orientation and more (Atkinson Smolen & Oswald, 2011). Multicultural literature has been defined in a number of studies as being both a window and a mirror; it is a mirror which provides people the opportunity to reflect on their own cultures, and also a window opening them up to other perspectives of viewing the world (see Schwartz, 1995, St. Amour, 2003 and Corapi & Short, 2015). Multicultural literature enables children to experience diverse perspectives and ways of viewing the world. Experiences with multicultural literature at a young age can become a tool to reinforce the idea that no one culture or way of life is better than any other, just different (St. Amour, 2003).

The parameters of the term multicultural literature will be constricted within this study to focus on literature which portrays minority cultures and peoples. Multicultural literature loses meaning when it includes the dominant mainstream culture (Cai, 2002). The very concept is dismantled by “dissolving its opposition to the literature of mainstream culture” as it reduces multicultural literature to mainstream popular literature (Cai, 2002, p. 8). This definition will narrow the parameters of the coding instrument whilst lending itself to critical multicultural ideologies by opposing the dominance of the majority culture within literature.

Critical multiculturalism in children's literature. Children's literature is not published in a vacuum (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). Publishing trends in children's literature are reflective of wider trends within society, as it is filtered by schools, libraries and publishing houses (Bradford, 2011). A critical multicultural analysis of children's literature is aware of how structural paradigms within society influence what gets written and published. Children's literature mirrors the power relations present within society. Critical

multiculturalism examines these influential power structures and attempts to examine their implications for social justice (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). Literature also has the power to enact change to these power structures as it encourages readers to approach issues and ideas from new perspectives and thus prepare the way for change (Reynolds, 2007). Thus, children's literature may align itself with critical multiculturalism.

A critical multicultural examination of children's literature will consider the extent to which the literature challenges mainstream power dynamics. Taxel has defined two traditions of literature; selective literature and oppositional literature (Schwartz, 1995). Selective literature is that which is representative of the dominant worldview, and thus further legitimates inequalities. By contrast, oppositional literature presents a counter hegemonic perspective of the world (Schwartz, 1995). Oppositional literature is aligned with a critical multicultural perspective as it attempts to destabilise power inequalities by showcasing diverse perspectives which subvert them.

Literature that is reflective of critical multiculturalism is one which is expanded to incorporate the experiences of groups which were previously neglected as expounded by Taxel (as cited in Schwartz, 1995). The means through which this representation occurs is of the foremost importance, as just because a book includes representations of diversity, it does not mean that the book represents a culture or character in a well-rounded, dynamic way (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003). For a culture to be presented in line with critical multiculturalism the representation of culture must avoid tokenism and oversimplified folklorisation of culture. This follows a notion of Otherness. The Other is defined as people who are culturally, racially and linguistically distinct from the dominant culture (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). The discourse of Otherness is reflective of some of the criticisms of traditional multiculturalism as it positions that identity as being fixed and unified (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). Critical multiculturalism rejects this notion of identity and culture in favour of one that

is fluid and dynamic. For children's literature to be defined as critically multicultural, represented cultures must be dynamic and multiple perspectives must be included.

A core tenet of critical multiculturalism is the interrogation of unequal power structures within society. This involves the representation of diverse characters with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds within children's literature. Bradford emphasises the need for this representation to be carefully considered in order to determine subjectivity within the text (2011). Bradford calls for the positioning of the reader to be examined, as strategies of focalisation and point of view are crucial in constructing the reader's perception of both characters and cultures. If minority groups or characters are always presented through the perspectives of mainstream focalising characters, then they will be construed as merely objects of the narrative discourse, rather than as subjects which have been accorded their own consciousness and motivations (Bradford, 2011). Critical multiculturalism thus calls for literature, which is not only inclusive of minority cultures, but also of minority perspectives.

Trends in Multicultural Children's Literature

A historic overview. The children's literature industry began to grow and reach wider audiences in the twentieth century. Despite its wider reach, children's literature remained overwhelmingly white in both content and authorship until well into the twentieth century (Rholetter, 2018). In order to circumvent the dominance of this hegemonic perspective within the United States, W.E.B. Du Bois included material for children within the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1910, before beginning publishing *The Brownie's Book* a decade later (Rholetter, 2018). *The Brownies' Book* was a radical departure from traditional children's publications which depicted Blacks in a negative and stereotypical light, if at all (Vaughn-Roberson & Hill, 1989).

Despite attempts by Du Bois and others to promote counter-hegemonic children's literature, representation of minority cultures in mainstream literature remained largely

aligned to racist stereotyping, a prime example being *The Story of Little Black Sambo* by Helen Bannerman (Rholetter, 2018). In the wake of the civil rights movement, changes were recorded, however, well-intentioned white writers were viewed as continuing to sustain offensive stereotypes (Rholetter, 2018). Simultaneously, strides were made by African American authors, such as Mildred D. Taylor, who provided realistic portrayals of African American life within children's literature. An example of this which is particularly important to this research is the 1963 Caldecott winner, *The Snowy Day*, which was the first colour picture book which featured an African American protagonist (Rholetter, 2018).

In recent years the movement towards authentic multicultural children's literature is still an ongoing issue. There continues to be a lack of books published which are reflective of minority societies. The Cooperative Children's Book Centre reported in 2016 that of 3,200 children's books published in the United States in 2015, only 234 books were about people of colour (Rholetter, 2018). The researcher has no knowledge of a similar survey undertaken in Ireland. There remains a gap in the knowledge of the availability of multicultural children's literature in Ireland.

An overview of the research. The question of diversity in children's literature is not a new one. The lack of diversity in children's literature has been problematised by scholars and critics for more than 75 years (Crisp et al., 2016, p. 29). In the 1970s a debate arose as to the nature of character representation in children's books (Sarland, 1999). It was argued that children's literature represented some cultures and groups at the expense of others, promoting certain values; namely white, male and middle-class (Sarland, 1999). Numerous studies have revealed the politically conservative bias present in children's literature (Sarland, 1999). Zimet's 1976 study, for example, was revealing of the exclusion of or stereotypical representation of ethnic minorities in children's literature (Sarland, 1999). This discourse was furthered and upheld by both Bob Dixon's 1977 study and that of Robert Leeson (1977)

which showcased the politically conservative views on race, gender and class which informed most British children's fiction at that time. The response to the findings of such studies was to promote the writing of children's fiction which centred on diverse protagonists (Sarland, 1999). This discourse centred on representation, though it failed to consider the complexity of these characters and the readers' positionality towards them, in a way which would be more aligned with the ideology of critical multiculturalism.

Establishing the Counter Hegemonic Perspective of Ireland

Ireland has traditionally been characterised as "Catholic, White and Gaelic" (Torvey & Share, 2003, p. 343). This is representative of the dominant perspective within Irish culture. Traditionally, the perspective of the white, Irish-born and catholic majority has been privileged, at the expense of other races and religions. Another core factor is that of social class, which is the "main form of social stratification in Ireland and in western, industrialised societies today" (McDonald, 2014, p. 119). Traditionally the middle-class perspective has been privileged over that of the working-class. Power dynamics within society have also pointed to longstanding issues of gender inequality and family concerns (Share, Corcoran, & Conway, 2012). Thus, the hegemonic perspective in Ireland is masculine, cis-gender and heterosexual. This worldview is the dominant one against which the study will examine the availability of picture books presenting a perspective which is counter to it.

Conclusion

The review of the literature has revealed the transformation of multicultural thinking and the transition towards critical multiculturalism. This form of multiculturalism calls for the dominant world view to be challenged and institutionalised hierarchies to be problematised. As such, it demands that the "rhetoric of interculturalism" be replaced by meaningful action to destabilise existing power structures. The objective of this research, as

outlined in the introduction, is to interrogate to what extent the literature is reflective of this, and thus is aligned to critical multiculturalism.

The trends of multiculturalism in children's literature have also been considered in order to orient the study within this paradigm. The literature has revealed that traditionally children's literature has reinforced the privileging of the majority culture within society, at the expense of minority peoples. This has thus resulted in the exclusion of minority children and the perception that their culture is undervalued in society, possibly affecting the child's self-esteem. The aim of the research is to ascertain whether this is still true of children's literature available in contemporary Ireland.

The literature suggests that there has been an increase in the availability of multicultural literature internationally. No studies were found to be undertaken on this within an Irish context. The research endeavours to address this gap in the current knowledge.

Finally, the dominant perspective in Ireland has been established. This perspective will serve as the counter to which the minority perspectives will be analysed. In this manner marginalised groups will be accounted for in the research in order to meet the objectives.

Methodology

Introduction

Research methods are all of the various techniques or methods which can be used to conduct research (Kumar, 2008). This chapter will outline the research method chosen for this study, the rationale behind it, the limitations of the study and ethical considerations.

Method

Qualitative research. The researcher chose to utilise a qualitative approach as qualitative research is concerned with interpreting documents and “the meaning-making process” (Quinn Patton, 2015, p. 3). The qualitative researcher gathers the data and interprets it, constructing and attaching meaning to it (Quinn Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is thus suited to the study as it allows for the examination of the picture books and grants the researcher the ability to attach meaning to the findings.

Qualitative research utilises a theoretical framework to inform the approach of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study applied a critical multicultural theoretical perspective as the foundational outlook for the study. The method through which this lens was realised is the grounded theory research method.

Grounded theory. Grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss in their seminal publication *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Bryman, 2001). Grounded theory is concerned with the development of the theory out of the data (Bryman, 2001). Where other theories insist upon the rigid formulation of preconceived codes, grounded theory allows for the relationship between data collection and analysis to “proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to one another” (Bryman, 2001, p. 389). This is known as the constant comparison method; the researcher is enabled to develop concepts from the data by coding and analysing simultaneously (Kolb, 2012; Taylor, Bogdan,

& DeVault, 2016). Grounded theory allows for both inductive and deductive reasoning to be utilised alongside one another, as the theory itself emerges from the data.

Grounded theory was chosen for this research study as it allows for the scope of the study to broaden throughout the research. As the coding does not have to be entirely pre-defined, it allows for additional codes to be added throughout the research based upon the literature itself. This was essential in this research to ensure that the codes are reflective of a broad understanding of diversity.

Coding. Coding is a fundamental process in qualitative research as it allows for the categorisation of data into different phenomena and concepts (Bryman, 2001). Coding involves the breaking down of qualitative textual data into separate parts and categories, before putting the data “back together in a meaningful way” (Creswell, 2015, p. 156 as cited in Elliott, 2018). Expressly, coding refers to the process of segmenting the data and labelling the text according to broad themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2012). The codes are then analysed to narrow the data into specific categories by grouping codes together to reflect the broader themes (Creswell, 2012).

For the purpose of this research two methods of coding were utilised in conjunction with one another:

- **Open Coding:** The text was reviewed, and relevant data was labelled according to the coding manual, which explicitly outlined the codes for the research study.
- **Axial Coding:** The data was then grouped into categories which are reflective of the reoccurring themes arising from the data.

(Kolb, 2012).

Open coding was utilised in this research to narrow the data found in the specific picture books to that which is reflective of the codes. This had the purpose of signalling those aspects of the picture books that are relevant to the codes to limit the volume of the data to that which

is relevant to the study. Then the axial coding was used to aggregate the data into organised themes which were then discussed in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

The coding manual was initially developed using prespecified codes before beginning the research. These codes were drawn directly from the Literature Review. Codes included:

- Selective versus Oppositional Literature (Schwartz, 1995)
- “Counter hegemonic perspective of the world” (Schwartz, 1995)
 - Culture
 - Language
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Working Class
 - Gender
 - Sexual Orientation
- Cultural Pluralism i.e. more than one culture presented in the book (Pakulski, 2014)
- Tokenism/Folklorisation of minority cultures (Kirova, 2008)
- Multidimensional representation of minority cultures (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Kirova, 2008)

To avoid the ‘limiting’ of the research by these pre-set codes, the research was “open to additional codes emerging during the analysis” (Elliott, 2018, p. 2855). These emergent codes aligned the study to grounded theory, as the data and theory developed in tandem with one another. The emergent codes required the researcher to review the already coded data to ensure that all of the data had been reviewed in light of each code (Elliott, 2018).

The coding followed a prescribed sequence in order to ensure uniformity of method and engagement with each picture book. The coding began with initial impressions; these impressions were based upon the external feature of the books, including cover art, title and blurb. The coding then continued throughout the rest of the book, through a consideration of both images and text.

Reliability and validity. Reliability and validity refer to the objectivity and credibility of the research. Specifically, reliability encapsulates the accuracy of the data, whilst validity is concerned with the “credibility of the analytic claims that are being made about those recordings” (Perakyla, 2016, p. 414). In the context of coding studies, two types of reliability testing can be undertaken (Elliott, 2018). Consistency can be checked between researchers (inter-rater reliability) or consistency can be checked over time with the same researcher. For this study, the latter option was utilised to ensure reliability. This involved coding each book initially. Then after an elapsed time period of two weeks each book was coded again in order to check for consistency and to ensure that each code had been applied. Reliability was ensured in this manner.

Sample. It was originally intended that the sample be chosen from a school library. It was determined that this could potentially reflect a biased selection and not an accurate reflection of the books available across the country, or indeed within most schools. The results would be reflective of just one school and would present too narrow and limited a view. The sample was chosen from the Inis Reading Guide for 2017/2018 from Children's Books Ireland (CBI), as this would be more reflective of contemporary children's literature available in wider Irish society. Access to these books was obtained from the researcher's local library.

Inis Guide. The Inis Reading Guide is published each year by CBI. CBI is the “national children's books organisation of Ireland” (CBI, n.d.). The Inis Reading Guide recommends the very best books in all genres and age groups (CBI, 2018). The research sample was selected from the following age group: 5-8 (N=40). The sample was further refined through the removal of all books which featured animals rather than humans as characters and those books which do not constitute picture books. This resulted in the final sample of books being comprised of the books listed in Table 1 (N=20).

Table 1*Finalised sample of books*

Title:	Sourced From:	Arrival Date:
Me and my Fear	Kildare Libraries	14/12/19
A Stone for Sascha	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	14/12/19
Felix's New Skirt	Leitrim County Library	14/12/19
An Saor Cloiche Mísona	North Dublin Libraries	13/12/19
The Holidays	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	14/12/19
The Rhythm of the Rain	Tipperary Libraries	14/12/19
The King Who Banned the Dark	Tipperary Libraries	14/12/19
We're Going to the Zoo!	Galway Libraries	14/12/19
The Dam	North Dublin Libraries	13/12/19
The House that Once Was	Donegal County Library	18/12/19
The Diver	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	17/12/19
How to Make Friends With a Ghost	Kildare County Libraries	17/12/19
Muireann agus an Fharráige Fhiáin	Dublin City Public Libraries	17/12/19
The Colour of People	Wicklow Libraries	14/12/19
They Say Blue	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	17/12/19

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

The Day War Came	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	17/12/19
Once Upon a Wild Wood	Monaghan County Libraries	19/12/19
The King of Nothing	Limerick City & County Library	12/02/20
Ocean Meets Sky	Fingal Libraries	20/12/19
Forever and a Day	Dún-Laoghaire/Rathdown Libraries	05/03/20

Limitations and Ethics

A potential limitation of this research was the access to the picture books in the sample. To obtain the necessary books, the researcher accessed local libraries which constrained the amount of time the researcher had access to each picture book. A further limitation of the study was the sample size, as it was a small-scale study. A small sample cannot be said to be representative of the population (Goddard & Melville, 2007).

Furthermore, given the constraints of the research, the impact the author's status as an insider or outsider of the minority culture has on their representation of this marginalised group was not considered. Another limitation of the study is that it was carried out by a solo researcher.

As such, it will be reflective of one point of view and cannot incorporate multiple perspectives. It is thus imperative that the researcher's positionality be explored.

Positionality

"A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions"

(Malterud, 2001, p. 483)

Grounded theory requires that researchers suspend their consideration of relevant theories until a late stage in the process of analysis. Bulmer (1979) questions the ability of the researcher to do this, given that it is generally agreed that what we perceive when conducting research is conditioned by our own worldview (Bryman, 2001). It is necessary as a researcher to be aware and cognizant of such internal biases in an effort to limit their implications on the study (Kolb, 2012). These biases should be shared with the reader to acknowledge that they may impact upon the study.

To that end it is necessary to disclose that the researcher is a cisgender, heterosexual, white female from a middle-class background. Hence, the researcher is part of the majority culture, particularly as a member of the teaching profession, which is largely female. I fundamentally believe in the concept of equality and that all peoples should be treated equally regardless of race, culture, sexuality or any other such factor. This is the paradigm which informs my worldview.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of the method utilised in the study. It has outlined how grounded theory forms the foundation of the research and its impact upon the methodology. The use of coding has been outlined, as well as how the reliability and validity of the study will be ensured. The reasoning behind the chosen sample has been further discussed, outlining how the Inis guide is representative of high-quality children's literature. Consideration was given to potential limitations of the study. Finally, the researcher's own positionality has been described. This chapter has thus outlined how the research will be undertaken, to achieve the objectives of the study.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The completion of the previously outlined research methodology resulted in several findings on the availability of multicultural children's literature in Ireland and the extent to which it aligns to critical multiculturalism. In this chapter the findings will be outlined and grouped thematically, in accordance with axial coding, wherein the coded text is grouped according to categories which are reflective of the reoccurring themes arising from the data (Kolb, 2012). The data will be discussed in relation to the objectives of the research, inquiring as to the extent the literature reflects a critical multicultural perspective. The chapter will explore the findings and expound upon how they relate to the counter hegemonic position outlined in the Literature Review. In doing so this chapter will reveal the extent to which picture books available in Ireland are representative of critical multiculturalism. Furthermore, the relationship between the picture books and the current Irish context will be explored.

Overview of the Findings

As was outlined in the Methodology chapter, each book was analysed for the codes. The codes are demonstrative of minority groups, which were determined by their opposition to the mainstream, white, heteronormative culture. As such, when coding for "race" the researcher analysed each book for any characters which were non-white. For example, *Ocean Meets Sky* centres on an Asian family, therefore it was deemed as representing a race that is non-white and offers a counterpoint to the dominant white mainstream in Ireland. Race was a relatively simplistic code to analyse in a picture book given the images presented. Harder to define were more abstract concepts such as culture. Culture was taken to be "the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Again, representation of cultures distinctive from the Catholic, Gaelic

tradition in Ireland were coded. For example *The Rhythm of the Rain* showcases an African tribe participating in a daily life which is very different from that in Ireland, whereby the clothes, work and homes of the people are different to that which is the norm in Ireland. *An Saor Cloiche Míshona* also explores a culture very distinctive from the traditional Irish one. The narrative focuses on a Japanese labourer and showcases aspects of Japanese culture including livelihoods, homes, jobs and food. The labourer is shown in a house accompanied by a traditional Japanese statue, teapot and cuisine. His Japanese culture is clearly showcased and celebrated.

Table 2 (overleaf) showcases the coding of each book and whether it was deemed to represent a counter-hegemonic perspective for each of the codes. Where one of the codes was found to be present in the book it is labelled "Yes". Where the code is not present in the literature it is left blank.

Selective Literature or Oppositional Literature. Table 2 showcases the number of books which included some form of representation of minority groups. However, this does not encapsulate the extent to which these minority characters were represented as well-rounded, multi-dimensional characters, rather than simply background characters with no subjectivity. To understand whether the books represent critical multicultural literature, the extent to which the minority characters are presented as multi-dimensional must also be considered (Bradford, 2011). Books which presented the perspective of such characters were deemed to present a counter hegemonic viewpoint, and as such, can be constituted as oppositional literature in line with Schwartz's definition (1995). The number of books which were representative of both selective literature and oppositional literature was recorded in Table 2. Books such as, *Felix's New Skirt*, were deemed oppositional literature despite tokenistic portrayals of other minorities as a marginalised character was presented in a multidimensional manner.

Table 2.*Overview of the Findings for Each Code*

Title	Race	Ethnicity	Class	LGBTQI+	Special Needs	Culture	Cultural Pluralism	Tokenism	Folklorisation	Multidimensional Minority Characters	Migrant	Challenging Gender Norms	Interracial Relationship	Selective Literature	Oppositional Literature
Me and My Fear	Yes	Yes					Yes			Yes	Yes				Yes
A Stone for Sascha	Yes	Yes				Yes				Yes					Yes
Felix's New Skirt	Yes	Yes		Yes				Yes		Yes		Yes			Yes
An Saor Cloiche Míshona	Yes	Yes				Yes				Yes					Yes
The Holidays															Yes
The Rhythm of the Rain	Yes	Yes				Yes									Yes
The King Who Banned the Dark	Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes								Yes
We're Going to the Zoo!															Yes
The Dam															Yes
A House That Once Was															Yes
The Diver	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes								Yes
How to Make Friends with a Ghost	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes								Yes
Muireann agus an Fharrage Fhiáin															Yes
Colour of People	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes			Yes					Yes
They Say Blue	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes					Yes
The Day War Came	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes				Yes
Once Upon a Wild Wood	Yes	Yes					Yes	Yes							Yes
Ocean Meets Sky	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes			Yes					Yes
The King of Nothing															Yes
Forever or a Day	Yes	Yes					Yes								Yes
Total:	14	14	1	1	2	9	10	2	0	8	2	1	0	10	10

“Rhetoric of Interculturalism” – How Inclusive Children’s Literature in Ireland Really is

Privileging the majority culture. To analyse the extent to which literature can be deemed critical multicultural literature, its stance as selective or oppositional literature must be considered. Selective literature is representative of the dominant worldview and further reinforces and legitimises existing power inequities. Ten of the 20 books analysed were found to belong to this category. These books showcased the perspective of the white, Irish, heteronormative dominant majority and did not attempt to challenge this power dynamic in any form. These books affirm Ireland’s “rhetoric of interculturalism” (Bryan, 2010). Bryan (2010) argues that Ireland continues to celebrate its movement towards inclusivity whilst doing little to challenge existing power imbalances. These ten books confirm this as they highlight that Ireland’s children’s literature still does not reflect a truly inclusive state, rather Ireland congratulates itself on its perceived movement towards inclusivity without the accompanying practical steps, such as the promotion of inclusive literature.

We’re Going to the Zoo! by Sara Bowie is the most apparent example. The book includes only white, middle-class characters. In doing so it promotes an image of Ireland that does not align with the current culturally pluralistic society which we inhabit. The 2016 Census revealed that there are now 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland (CSO, 2019). Furthermore, it places emphasis on the perspectives and emotions of the white, middle-class majority at the expense of minority groups, by showcasing only the perspective of these characters. The narrator is a white, middle-class girl, thus the story showcases only her view and opinions, “Here’s me with all my drawings”, “Both me and my sister think he is the cutest thing we’ve ever seen”. This reveals the privilege this group still maintains in society despite Ireland’s rhetoric of interculturalism, as the majority culture is still the most common narrator and focaliser in the books.

Other books, such as *Once Upon a Wild Wood*, also exemplify selective literature as, though they have included minority peoples as background characters, these characters do not partake in any dialogue throughout the book, becoming objects of the narrative discourse as warned by Bradford (2011). In this manner the thoughts of the protagonist and other white characters are privileged over that of the background minority characters, legitimating this unequal power imbalance in society. Thus, these books exemplify a traditional multicultural perspective. Critical pedagogy lamented this aspect of traditional multiculturalism wherein minorities were conceived as static and one-dimensional (May & Sleeter, 2010). As the minority characters in these books are subordinate to those of the mainstream culture their inclusion serves to be without the support of a transformative political agenda, reinforcing the dominant, mainstream culture. Therefore, these books showcase the problems with traditional multiculturalism as denounced by critical pedagogy, highlighting that despite Ireland's self-proclaimed inclusivity (Bryan, 2010) there remains a lack of true inclusivity in the children's literature available.

Reinforcing the power imbalance through tokenism. Rather than promoting critical multiculturalism, Ireland instead appears to embrace traditional multiculturalism in half of the sample analysed. Traditional multiculturalism promotes tolerance towards cultural diversity, whilst failing to consider or challenge the unequal power structures in society which undermine marginalised and minority groups (Bradford, 2011). As such, literature which similarly fails to interrogate the power structures in society and realign itself with critical multiculturalism is emblematic of traditional multiculturalism and its failings. These books can both acknowledge and embrace cultural diversity, as promoted by traditional multiculturalism (Tasan-Kok, van Kempen, Raco, & Bolt, 2013), whilst still failing to address this power imbalance. Books which incorporate representation of minority cultures or

peoples which is tokenistic in nature or reflective of folklorisation are demonstrative of traditional multiculturalism (Prato, 2009).

Folklorisation involves the reduction of minority cultures/peoples to static/stereotypical conceptions of their culture/identity. It is a reductive view of culture, which oversimplifies the identity of minority peoples and exoticizes them as "Other". Many children's books in the early twentieth century featured racist caricatures, which negatively portrayed stereotyped Black and minority characters (Nel, 2017). Unfortunately, such stereotyping even took place amongst books still popular today, including in books by Dr. Seuss, the well-known, popular children's author. The titular character in *The Cat in the Hat* is infamously based on blackface performance and racist images in popular culture of the time (Nel, 2017). Additionally, children's books may exoticize the Other in a form of Orientalism (Awadh Shafie & Aljohani, 2019). Such representations focus on the difference between cultures, in a manner which may be regarded as embodying a colonialist attitude as the Other is implied to be inferior to the more "civilised" Western culture. Representations of minority cultures in literature should avoid this characterisation of minority peoples as it legitimises the stereotypes it portrays. Fortunately, the findings of the research were that none of the books coded included any form of folklorisation or Othering of characters.

Unfortunately, tokenistic representation was an issue in two books. Tokenism is the practice of only making symbolic efforts towards inclusion (Merriam-Webster, 2020). These books undermined the minority and marginalised characters they included by further marginalising them in the literature. These characters, such as the two Black princesses in *Once Upon a Wild Wood*, are excluded from the white, middle-class characters and do not partake in the narrative discourse in any way. These characters serve to enrich the middle-class, white narrative, only participating in the narrative as part of the group of princesses, "The twelve dancing princesses took their time choosing which of the princes to dance with",

with no meaningful insight given to their thoughts, opinions or subjectivity. This is reflective of an issue Bryan (2010) argues is an ongoing problem in Irish society. Bryan argues that through traditional multiculturalism the dominant cultural group in Irish society “simply exists”, whilst “minorities exist to enrich dominant culture and are defined in terms of how, and to what extent, they benefit the ‘host’ culture” (Bryan, 2010, p.255). In this manner these books serve to legitimate the power structures in society that facilitate the marginalisation of these groups. This speaks to a wider issue in Irish society, where despite claiming to be an inclusive state, Ireland has done little to target the power structures which perpetuate the marginalisation of minority peoples (Bryan, 2010).

Targeting Power Imbalances in Society

The remaining ten books (half of the sample) were categorised as examples of oppositional literature. These books challenge and interrogate the unequal power structures within society. In doing so they speak to a change occurring within Irish society wherein minority voices are beginning to be heard.

Multi-dimensional minority characters. As Bradford (2011) explicated, for minority characters to be construed as subjects they must be accorded their own consciousness and motivations within the literature. These books showcase minority groups as dynamic and fluid by imbuing their characters with a unique consciousness and subjectivity, which is aligned to Kirova's (2008) understanding of critical multiculturalism. By presenting the minority characters as having a fluid and complex identity, these picture books are subverting and interrogating the societal power imbalance in a manner aligned to critical multiculturalism. Such picture books become a necessary tool to fight the marginalisation of minority peoples, as they offer an alternative view of society wherein the power imbalance has been challenged (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical multiculturalism thus calls for literature, which is not only inclusive of minority cultures, but also of minority perspectives, and in which cultures and characters are presented in a well-rounded, dynamic way (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003). Books such as *The Day War Came* successfully imbue their minority characters with their own motivations and emotions as subjects, rather than as objects, of the narrative discourse and in doing so challenge the hegemonic perspective in society. *The Day War Came* is a particularly notable example as it is written in the first-person perspective from the point of view of a Middle-Eastern child refugee, "And then I understood that war had got here too". In this manner, the refugee has become the core focaliser and narrator of the text, promoting her viewpoint and subverting societal power norms. This is important as in this manner literature has the power to enact change over existing power structures, through encouraging its readers to understand new perspectives and thus preparing them for change (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009).

A new society. Cultural pluralism was present in ten of the 20 books sampled. These books presented diverse and egalitarian societies in which people of different cultures, races and religions interacted with one another, where all groups were represented as subjects of the text, in line with the tenets of critical multiculturalism. Thus, these books were aligned to Pakulski's (2014) definition of cultural pluralism, showcasing societies with ethno-specific cultures, regional and generational subcultures. This is indicative of a transformation of what children's literature is choosing to present to its readers as the societal norm and is also subverting traditional power inequalities, as it allows the reader to see a new power dynamic and confronts them with new ideas (Reynolds, 2007).

Impact on Minority Children

Alienating minority children. That six books were found to only have characters which were white, middle-class and representative of the cultural hegemony speaks to the dominance of said hegemony within children's literature. That these books did not include a

single character which represented any of the more marginalised groups in society (be that by race, religion, immigration status etc.) is indicative of the ongoing pervasiveness of the traditional mainstream culture, that which is “Catholic, White and Gaelic” (Torvey & Share, 2003, p. 343).

The lack of any form of diversity in these six books is representative of the extent to which Ireland still embraces a traditional multicultural approach. Ireland is still exhibiting a rhetoric of interculturalism, as argued by Audrey Bryan (2010), in which society praises itself for becoming a more inclusive state whilst still reinforcing power inequities. These six books are demonstrative of this, as they place the white, mainstream, middle-class and heteronormative perspective above all else. It further alienates the marginalised groups who do not see their culture reflected or represented in the literature they read and may develop a belief that they have little value or importance to school or society (Hinton & Dickinson, 2007). This can have the unfortunate impact of reducing a minority child's self-esteem as they perceive society as not valuing their culture (Campbell Naidoo, 2014). This may cause pupils to lose interest in school and their academic performance may suffer (Hinton & Berry, 2004), as showcased in Ambady et al.'s study (2001). This will further alienate minority children from society as they become disenfranchised.

Representation of Different Minority Groups

Coding was used to determine the level of representation of different minority groups within the books. Per Table 2 several books included some form of representation. However, this representation was not evenly distributed. Bryan (2010) argues that the Irish approach of celebrating and embracing diversity positions the dominant cultural group as the “valuer” of difference who characterises the minorities in terms of how and to what extent they benefit the host culture. Therefore, the minorities represented in the children's literature is that which is representative of what the dominant culture has deemed acceptable. Bryan's argument

maintains that this approach to interculturalism reinforces a power dynamic whereby the majority determines the value of incoming minorities based on their ability to contribute to the host culture. This research, therefore, highlighted key areas where representation needs to be increased in order to destabilise this power imbalance.

Migrants and special needs. Migrants and people with special needs were present in just two books each. As Smith-D'Arezzo (2003) argued, it is crucial to examine the nature of this representation in order to determine whether it is more aligned with critical or traditional multiculturalism. In both books the migrant was a central subjective character whose consciousness was expounded and explored. Through presenting the perspective of the migrant, the book encourages the reader to imbue importance on this character, thereby emphasising the importance of the minority culture represented in the mind of the reader (Bradford, 2011). These books are, therefore, aligned with critical multiculturalism as they subvert dominant power structures by placing value on the migrant.

Unfortunately, the two characters encountered with special needs were both background characters who were mere objects of the narrative. Neither character played a central role in the story nor were imbued with any sort of consciousness. Their presence in the narrative was tokenistic, as their identity was seen as being fixed and unified (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). These characters were seen to be lesser by the reader as they were neither a focaliser nor narrator and the text did not concern itself with their thoughts or motivations (Bradford, 2011). This representation of characters with special needs reinforced a traditional power dynamic wherein this group was presented as lesser. This is an example of traditional multiculturalism, whereby the minority culture is embraced and celebrated without any interrogation of society's power structure.

Working-class and LGBTQI+. Characters which diverted from the dominant Irish worldview by being members of the working-class or the LGBTQI+ community were further side-lined within the literature. Both groups were coded in just one book each. This is a clear indicator of how the dominant culture can cherry-pick the minority cultures which it chooses to accept and value (Bryan, 2010). The two books which do explore a working-class character and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, *The Day War Came* and *Felix's New Skirt* respectively, allow these characters subjectivity and consciousness as the protagonists of the books. For example, *Felix's New Skirt* centralises on a young boy who defies the gender binary by electing to wear what has traditionally been classed as a feminine item of clothing. His viewpoint and perspective are explored greatly throughout the book, "It's not fair that girls are allowed to wear pants, but boys can't wear skirts". That the books presented subjective characters who are representative of the counter-hegemonic perspective is a showcase of critical multiculturalism. These books therefore are representative of critical multiculturalism, whilst also exposing the dominant culture's failure to truly embrace these minorities – as children's literature is representative of the trends of wider society (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009).

Though certain books were representative of the marginalised voices coded for, unfortunately the number of books which included these characters was very low, as per Table 2. This is indicative of the fact that despite the exemplary movement towards critical multiculturalism in some children's literature, there remains a large level of underrepresentation of certain peoples and groups. Where the representation of different races and cultures has significantly increased (and should still be promoted to continue on this upward trajectory) other marginalised communities remain largely neglected, including the special needs community, migrants, LGBTQ+ community and the working-class. This acceptance of some minority groups over others exemplifies Bryan's (2010) argument that

the dominant Irish mainstream culture chooses the value of the minorities. This speaks to what the mainstream culture is willing to accept, tolerate and embrace behind its rhetoric of inclusivity.

Additional Codes

One interesting finding of the research was the addition of two codes which the researcher had overlooked. During prior analysis of critical multiculturalism and its impact on literature the concepts of gender norms and interracial relationships did not arise. It was during the coding process itself that the researcher realised that they had not as yet been discussed, included or coded for. As representation is important for all children to see themselves in the literature they are reading (Hinton & Dickinson, 2007), it is thus of the utmost importance that critical multicultural literature encapsulates both of these areas.

Gender norms. Extensive studies have revealed that children's picture books have a significant role in shaping children's developmental awareness of different gender roles (Tsao, 2008). That is to say that the gender stereotypical thinking displayed in children's literature may "limit children's choices, interests and abilities" (Tsao, 2008, p. 109). Nearly all of the literature included in the research avoided challenging traditional gender norms. They did not question the stereotypical image of what it means to be masculine or feminine, how society views these roles, and the norms we impose on gender. The one exception was *Felix's New Skirt*. As was stated in the literature review, children's literature is not published in a vacuum (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). Rather, it is reflective of accepted ideas and trends within society. It is clear from the research that the rise of critical multiculturalism in children's literature has not extended to gender norms. These social conventions are further legitimised within the literature, rather than challenged or subverted (apart from *Felix's New Skirt*).

Interracial relationships. The United States has a much more established multicultural society than Ireland's more recently developed one. Its complicated history with interracial relationships exposes how mainstream America has categorised them as taboo, with limited exposure in the media (Magnuson-Cannady, 2005). Despite the ever-increasing population of people in the United States who were currently engaged in interracial relationships, in 2005 they were rarely depicted in advertisements, on television or in movies, indicating just how marginalised these relationships had become (Magnuson-Cannady, 2005).

The effects of this marginalisation of the population of people in interracial relationships is potentially very damaging. It has been shown that mass-media portrayals of interracial relationships result in positive attitudes towards such relationships (Lienemann & Stopp, 2013). Thus, the inclusion of these types of relationships are of the utmost importance in any multicultural society to promote tolerance, acceptance and positivity towards them.

Unfortunately, the children's books analysed revealed that interracial relationships remain taboo within the industry in Ireland. None of the books included any interracial relationships between characters (including background characters). This has the effect of negating this group of people and may impact upon their self-esteem and pride in their identity, as they are negated by society (Campbell Naidoo, 2014). Once again, this showcases how the children's literature available in Ireland is not aligned to the perspective of critical multiculturalism.

Representation is important for these underrepresented groups. Their negation in children's literature speaks to what Irish society has deemed acceptable, as children's books are reflective of broader societal trends (Bothelho & Rudman, 2009). This may have a damaging effect on children who do not see themselves or their families represented in the

books they read, as they may develop a belief that they have little value or importance in school or society (Hinton & Dickinson, 2007).

Availability

The Inis reading guide seeks to promote high quality children's literature in Ireland, its goal is to "recommend the very best books" for children and young people (CBI, 2018, p. 3). All Irish children would greatly benefit from access to the books included in the guide. That none of the books were available in the local library itself and they all had to be ordered and transported from different parts of the country (see Table 1), taking up to three months, is indicative of a limited availability of this high-quality children's literature. To determine whether this reflection of the availability of the books is accurate the researcher searched each book on Libraries Ireland which has a "single shared system" cataloguing all of the books in public libraries in the state (Libraries Ireland, 2020). The researcher collated the results in Table 3 (appendix A). The results showcase the extremely limited availability of most of the books within the local libraries in Ireland. This additional research further highlighted the need for libraries, teachers and parents to increase the availability of such books to Irish children.

Conclusion

The findings have yielded mixed results. These results have been discussed in relation to the literature under key themes, arising from the codes. The impact of the findings and discussions is several conclusions pertaining to the research questions and objectives.

A rhetoric of interculturalism and the power balance. The findings of the study revealed that half of the books privilege the majority culture. This undermines claims that Ireland is a fully inclusive society in line with Audrey Bryan's (2010) argument that Ireland is not truly a critical multicultural society, rather it promotes traditional multiculturalism,

claiming to embrace the marginalised whilst still maintaining the supremacy of the majority culture.

The other half of the books represented a movement towards critical multiculturalism, wherein the voices of minority characters were uplifted. This has the impact of encouraging real change within society, by preparing the reader for a new society by showing them a different alternative (Reynolds, 2007). Thus, the children's literature examined reveals that there is a dichotomy present whereby half of the books legitimate power imbalances and the other half work to destabilise them.

Minority children in Ireland. Many minority groups in Ireland are excluded from the children's books or present in a rare few. This is particularly worrying when one considers that the Inis guide is representative of the very best of children's literature. It does not speak to the books that most children have access to which may not be the same high-quality literature. Rather the study suggests that even the high-quality literature still has strides to make towards meaningful inclusion in line with critical multiculturalism.

Unequal representation. The research has revealed that not all minority groups are represented equally within children's literature. Groups such as the working-class and the LGBTQI+ community are further marginalised relative to others.

Availability. The books were not readily available, as clearly shown in Appendix A.

The conclusions are thus largely mixed, suggesting that the literature is representative of a society in flux. There is a movement towards critical multiculturalism in high-quality children's picture books available in Ireland. There remains, however, strides to be made even amongst the "very best" books (CBI, 2018).

Conclusion

Introduction

The research is indicative of the degree to which contemporary children's picture books in Ireland are aligned to the discourse of critical multiculturalism. How the findings of this research contribute to the wider community will now be outlined. Further recommendations of the research and its limitations will be discussed to situate the study within the broader context of previously undertaken research.

Contribution of the Research

The literature review revealed the limited nature of research previously undertaken on the level of multiculturalism presented in children's books in the Irish context. This research is a preliminary guide to the availability of such picture books in contemporary Ireland. The research is an important initial step towards launching a conversation in Ireland about the literature available to our children and its contribution to their representation and wellbeing. Therefore, the research offers an important guide to teachers, librarians, parents and even the Department of Education and Skills.

Teachers should be made aware that critical multicultural discourse is present in half of the picture books analysed. These picture books, however, did not have widespread availability. Thus, teachers should ensure that the libraries in their classrooms and the books they use in the classroom are representative of this high-quality literature which includes a critical multicultural perspective.

Librarians should prioritise the inclusion of high-quality critical multicultural books for children. The research was reflective of the difficulty of obtaining such books from a local library. Though the books are in circulation between Irish libraries they do not have widespread, easy access.

The Department of Education and Skills should endeavour to ensure all school textbooks are more inclusive of multicultural perspectives. The Literature Review revealed just how important representation is for children and the extent to which its inclusion has not been discussed within the Irish context. This must be addressed in order to promote the wellbeing of all children within the contemporary Irish classroom.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by several factors including the sample size, the use of a solo researcher and the scale of the research.

Given the time constraints of the research it was imperative that the sample be small and specific. The researcher wanted this research to be an initial step in determining whether critical multicultural literature was available within the contemporary Irish context. Therefore, it was determined that the sample should be taken from the Inis guide as this would indicate if the high-quality literature available was reflective of critical multiculturalism. A limitation of this study is thus that it is not representative of the ordinary classroom or local library and is not an accurate reflection of the literature available to most Irish children. It speaks to the limited availability of the high-quality literature but does confirm that half of this literature reflects oppositional literature. Additionally, given the constraints of the research, the impact the author's status as an insider or outsider of the minority culture has on the representation of this marginalised group was not considered.

Furthermore, the research was undertaken by a solo researcher. The result being that it can only reflect the perspective and bias of one person. This positionality is laid out in the Methodology chapter to give an accurate representation of the limitation of the solo researcher.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on the limitations of this study and expand upon them. Now that the availability of high-quality children's picture books with a critical multicultural perspective has been established within the Irish context, it remains to be seen how these books are incorporated into the ordinary life of the child. Further research should thus focus on the availability of such books in the classroom library, in local libraries and the level of multicultural representation within school textbooks. The research should also consider how this availability is impacted by location and population demographics within certain locations in Ireland.

Once the level of availability of critical multicultural children's literature has been established, the focus of the studies can then change towards the popularity of such literature. The research should then consider the popularity of these books amongst children themselves. This research should be further expanded to consider how the popularity is impacted by the demographics of the children and the literature promoted to them by their parents, teachers and peers.

The authorship of the literature should also be considered in future research. Research could focus on how the author's status as an insider or outsider of a culture impacts how they represent that culture.

My Learning Around Critical Multiculturalism in Contemporary Picture Books

Throughout the course of this research I have developed a greater understanding of the importance of representation for children. I now understand more fully the impact of seeing different cultures in the literature they read not only for children from marginalised groups, but for all children. Furthermore, through analysing the literature, I discovered the importance of ensuring the multi-dimensional representation of minority characters. This, for me, is the most important learning I have taken from the research.

Conclusion

This research has showcased the level of representation of minority peoples and groups within contemporary picture books included in the 2018 Inis guide. It has analysed the extent to which this representation was reflective of a critical multicultural perspective (the counter-hegemonic perspective). The findings of the study were largely mixed, showcasing a move towards critical multicultural representation, though this movement was not equally representative of all minority groups. This speaks to a society which is in flux between a rhetoric of interculturalism and meaningful critical multiculturalism. The study thus points to the need for further critical multicultural representation of all minority groups.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Table 3

Availability of Each Book on Libraries Ireland

Libraries in Ireland	
Title:	No. of Copies
Me and My Fear	403
A Stone for Sascha	44
Felix's New Skirt	3
An Saor Cloiche Míshona	37
The Holidays	56
The Rhythm of the Rain	13
The King Who Banned the Dark	82
We're Going to the Zoo!	175
The Dam	29
A House That Once Was	11
The Diver	46
How to Make Friends with a Ghost	70
Muireann agus an Fharraige Fhiáin	51
Colour of People	81
They Say Blue	46
The Day War Came	40
Once Upon a Wild Wood	41
Ocean Meets Sky	47
The King of Nothing	54
Forever or a Day	46

Appendix B.

The Sample

A House That Once Was - Julie Fogliano & Lane Smith

A Stone for Sascha - Aaron Becker

An Saor Cloiche Míshona - Charlotte Guillain & Steve Dorado

Colour of People - Maurico Negro

Felix's New Skirt - Kerstin Brichzin & Igor Kuprin

Forever or a Day - Sarah Jacoby

How to Make Friends with a Ghost - Rebecca Green

Me and My Fear - Francesca Sanna

Muireann agus an Fharráige Fhiáin - Malachy Doyle & Andrew Whitson

Ocean Meets Sky - The Fan Brothers

Once Upon a Wild Wood - Chris Riddell

The Dam - David Almond & Levi Pinfold

The Day War Came - Nicola Davies & Rebecca Cobb

The Diver - Veronica Carratello

The Holidays - Blexbolex

The King of Nothing - Guridi

The King Who Banned the Dark - Emily Haworth-Booth

The Rhythm of the Rain - Grahame Baker-Smith

They Say Blue - Jillian Tamaki

We're Going to the Zoo! - Sarah Bowie

Appendix C.

The Coding List

Selective Literature

Oppositional Literature

Counter Hegemonic Perspective

Culture

Language

Race

Ethnicity

Class

Gender

Sexual Orientation/LGBTQI+

Cultural Pluralism

Tokenism

Folklorisation

Multidimensional representation of minority cultures

Power Relations

Focaliser

Background Characters

Narrator

Minor Characters

Protagonist

Educational Book

Religion

Migrant

Sexual Orientation

Special Needs

Cover

Title

Blurb

Additional Codes (Added During the Coding Process):

Gender norms

Interracial relationship