The Illusion of Inclusion: Disempowered "Diversity" in 2018 Australian Children's picture books

Abstract

Research into diverse representation in children's literature has predominantly focused on highlighting positive representations of marginalised communities, or critiquing overtly negative stereotypes. While important, this has resulted in the more innocuous representations of marginalised characters being overlooked in scholarship. This study discusses 35 2018 Australian children's picture books in which marginalised characters were depicted; yet their identities were not engaged with as part of an enjoyable narrative. These findings provide new insights for scholars, librarians, educators, readers, and publishers, that can support the identification of truly inclusive children's picture books.

Keywords: picture books; children's fiction; Australian fiction; diversity; ownvoices.

Word Count of article: 5594

The Illusion of Inclusion: Disempowered "Diversity" in 2018 Australian Children's picture books

Introduction

Discussion about the importance of increasing the representation of traditionally marginalized communities in children's literature has reached a new level of prominence in recent years, spurred by the 2014 #WeNeedDiverseBooks movement. A non-profit that originated as a hashtag, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) as an organisation has campaigned for greater representation of "diverse experiences", which includes identities and experiences such as being First Nations, a Person of Color, Queer, disabled, and more (WNDB, "About WNDB"). The subsequent growth in publication of so-called "diverse books" and marginalized authors in markets such as the United States, as a result of this mainstream advocacy, has been observed (Corrie). In mainstream conversations among readers and in scholarship, particular attention has also been paid to "OwnVoices" authors; a term coined by Dutch young adult fiction author Corinne Duyvis to refer to books where marginalized protagonists share their authors' identities (Duyvis). However, this same book industry progress, and greater publisher attention on diversity, has not been observed in the Australian publishing industry's recent outputs despite the considerable influence that US markets have on the Australian YA market (Booth & Narayan, "Identifying Inclusion", 8). Further, there has been limited scholarly engagement in Australia with these prominent international discussions.

This article discusses a collaborative project between a researcher and the local publishing industry, volunteer-run advocacy group *Voices from the Intersection* (VFTI), which advocates for greater industry access for Australian authors of OwnVoices children's and young adult fiction (Lim). This project was designed as a simple "creator count" of the number of OwnVoices Australian children's picture books published in 2018, recognizing

both authors and illustrators. For the purposes of this study, we particularly focused on the four demographics of First Nations people, People of Color, Queer people, and Disabled people. A total of 13 books were identified as having OwnVoices status, and those results have been published elsewhere (Booth, et al.). However, in the course of this study, our attention was also drawn to representation of marginalized protagonists in the sample more broadly. There were 12 narrative-driven books which could not be identified as OwnVoices, but which featured marginalized protagonists—books we refer to in this article as "outsider books", to highlight the creators' status as an outsider to the community they depicted. There were also an additional 23 books which included representations of marginalized characters, but lacked meaningful engagement with these characters' identities within the context of the book's narrative. The total number of books in these two categories of non-OwnVoices picture books was 35.

In this article, we examine common, shared attributes of each of these two sets of non-OwnVoices books. An examination of these two sets of non-OwnVoices books featuring marginalized characters provides insight into the Australian publishing industry's views towards picture books about marginalized characters, as it reveals the types of books that have been deemed worthy of the investment of resources to publish them. Within the broader discussions about the access to publication for marginalized authors and illustrators, and the value of OwnVoices books, it is essential to understand what non-OwnVoices books contribute to the market.

Literature Review

When advocacy for more inclusive publishing practices for children's and young adult literature reached the mainstream in 2014, much of the focus was on representation within the fiction itself. US scholarship ranging from Larrick's foundational 1965 study, 'The All-White World of Children's Books', to more recent statistics on the publication of books by and

about marginalized people by the Children's Cooperative Book Centre (CCBC) were frequently cited in mainstream advocacy (Larrick; Corrie; WNDB, "Frequently Asked Questions"). However, the initial Tweet that instigated this movement by young adult fiction author Aisha Saeed made no reference to on-page representations; rather, she was criticizing the lack of cultural diversity among the *authors* at an author convention:

> No Diverse Authors at #Bookcon None. Nada. Zilch. #Nowords
>
> http://Bookriot.Com/Staff-Contributors/ … … #Weneeddiversebooks @Bookriot.
>
> (Saeed 24 April 2014)

Saeed's criticism of the all-white author line-up prompted a global movement of readers, librarians and parents advocating for more inclusive literature. Yet when the CCBC released their data in 2015, it appeared that the US publishing industry had somewhat missed the mark in responding to this criticism. The number of books about marginalized people had increased, but this increase was predominantly due to the works of individuals who did *not* identify with the marginalized community they depicted (Lindgren).

Saeed's criticism remains highly pertinent. The trend of outsider writers contributing significantly, or even primarily, to the growth of books about marginalized communities in the US has continued over the years (Schliesman; Tyner). One possible, and concerning, interpretation of this trend is that US publishers appeared to have embraced books about these communities that were written by outsiders, rather than members of these communities themselves. This international trend raised questions for the researcher regarding whether it was being replicated by local publishers in Australia, too.

It is crucial to note that increases in on-page representations of marginalized characters are not considered a negative development. Reading depictions of marginalized experiences in children's and young adult fiction books have been found to combat a range of prejudices among readers, such as sexism, homophobia, and ableism (Malo-Juvera; Sieben &

Wallowitz; Cameron & Rutland). These books can support the development of empathy towards individuals different to oneself (Gierzynski & Eddy; Pallotta-Chiarolli). They also foster greater engagement from readers who identify with the same cultural community as the character, and provide comfort for those who may feel vulnerable due to their identity, such as teenagers discovering they are not heterosexual (Feger; Misson). In addition to these personal benefits for young readers, diversity among character casts can potentially make a story more fresh and engaging for all readers, regardless of their own identities.

Yet scholars have noted that not all representations of marginalized characters are of equal quality as works of literature. In her 1982 study of representations of African American characters in US children's and young adult fiction, Bishop observed that "the literary quality" of many of the books about African American characters "is poor enough to suggest that had they not been timely, they might not have been published at all" (30). In particular, she expressed the belief that these books appeared to seek to educate white readers about racism rather than provide a genuinely engaging story to African American children (14). These books contrast starkly with those which she believed truly sought to represent and entertain African American children and did so with rich, enjoyable stories; and she noted that these books were all by African American authors (99).

Similarly, Short and Fox have noted that authors writing about marginalized identities which they themselves do not share have "differing intentions" to those of an author writing about their own community (17). Outsider authors write to educate fellow outsider children, while authors writing about their own communities write to benefit children who share their identity (ibid.). This is affirmed by more recent research with Australian authors of OwnVoices young adult fiction, which has revealed that these authors are often at least partially motivated to write to represent their own communities on the market, especially if they lacked this representation as a child reader themselves (Booth & Narayan, "Towards

Diversity"). Additionally, these same authors unanimously agreed that their own books had more "authenticity" than those of authors who were outsiders to their community, as a direct result of their own identities being the same as their protagonists' (Booth & Narayan, "That Authenticity is Missing").

If, as the scholarship suggests, books by outsiders to the marginalized communities they depict are crafted with different intentions than those by OwnVoices creators, and ultimately produce different results on the page, it can be concluded that these books should not be considered interchangeable with OwnVoices books. Thus, calls for inclusive fiction for children and young adults can only truly be answered by authors who are of these communities. As Saeed originally identified, it is the inclusion of marginalized authors that must be prioritized as a goal for change; not just representation on the page.

Equity in authorship and representation is especially important with regard to picture books, as they are a formative stage in a young person's development of their relationship to reading, and their worldview and self-image. In Australia, several publishers have expressed interest in OwnVoices stories in their online submissions pages, indicating an awareness of the interest in inclusive fiction (Allen & Unwin; Walker Books). However, unlike the US publishing industry discussed above, Australia does not have the same breadth of research or industry statistics. This has resulted in a limited understanding of Australian publishers' outputs in relation to marginalized communities, as there is no authoritative record of publishers' engagement with international movements towards more inclusive fiction, or the true level of access to publication for marginalized creators, such as authors and illustrators.

The study discussed in this article originally focused on 2018 OwnVoices children's picture books; however, the discovery of two additional categories of so-called diverse books was a significant finding requiring its own attention. These two categories were the narrative-driven books by outsider authors and illustrators, and books which employed representations

of marginalized characters but did not engage with these identities in relation to the book's narrative. The nature of these categories of books and their representations of marginalized experiences, and their presence on the local market, have implications for the Australian publishing industry, and the broader global discussions pertaining to diversity advocacy in children's and young adult literature.

Method and Analysis

This project was co-designed by the researcher and the volunteer-run advocacy group *Voices from the Intersection* (VFTI). The researcher approached VFTI for collaboration, and VFTI selected the research topic based on their need for data that could support their advocacy within the Australian publishing industry. VFTI generously volunteered their time, and the research was funded by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) through the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion's 2019 Social Impact Grant. The method for this project was previously designed by the researcher for a 2016 project, of which the findings have been published (Booth & Narayan, "Towards Diversity"; Booth & Narayan, "Don't Talk"; Booth & Narayan, "The Expectations"; Booth & Narayan, "That Authenticity is Missing"; Booth & Narayan, "Identifying Inclusion"; Booth & Narayan, "Behind Closed Gates"). A detailed discussion of how this method was adapted for this project has also already been published (see Booth, et al.) and thus we only provide a brief overview here, and focus on how analysis of the findings in this article was conducted.

Book data was collected through bibliographic retrieval from the *AustLit Database* (https://www.austlit.edu.au/) on 22 August 2019. The *AustLit Database* is a not-for-profit collaboration between the National Library of Australia and Australian researchers, with the University of Queensland (Australia) leading the project as of 2002 (AustLit, "About AustLit"). It is a legal requirement that a copy of all books published in Australia be deposited at the National Library of Australia to comply with copyright law (National Library

of Australia). The *AustLit Database* thus provides a comprehensive and authoritative overview of all books published in Australia. Books within the sample that were beyond the scope of the project, including the occasional miscategorized books, publisher anthologies and franchise tie-in books, series data, duplicates, books by non-Australian creators, and self-published books, were excluded from the dataset. This resulted in a sample of 284 books, with data cross-referenced with the National Library of Australia's *Trove* records to ensure publication data was correct.

A comprehensive review of paratextual and epitextual material for these books was undertaken to gather authors' and illustrators' information about community affiliation that was freely self-disclosed in their professional context. These materials included "press releases and teaching materials for their books, professional biographies, interviews with media and reviewers, posts on the creators' professional websites, and publicity materials from publishers" (Booth, et al. 33). Social media was excluded as a source out of recognition that personal and professional boundaries can be blurred in such spaces. (For further discussion of this, see Booth & Narayan, "Towards Diversity"; Booth & Narayan, "Don't Talk"; Booth & Narayan, "The Expectations"; Booth & Narayan, "That Authenticity Is Missing"; Booth & Narayan, "Identifying Inclusion"; Booth & Narayan, "Behind Closed Gates"; Booth, et al.).

To determine characters' identities, the researcher examined each picture book's "covers and blurbs, the publisher materials released about them, metadata on the *AustLit Database* and in *Trove*, and reader reviews on community-generated sites such as *Goodreads*" (Booth, et al. 33) to determine the community affiliation of the protagonist(s). To analyze the picture books themselves, this project employed and extended Kurz's 2012 study and criteria for identifying cultural diversity, which included "skin tone, clothing, hairstyle, race/ethnicity of protagonist(s), setting, overall race/ethnicity of the book..." (Kurz

133–134). Additionally, as this study also aimed to identify Queer identities and disabled identities, we also sought "illustrations of or references to disability aids or physical disability, and depictions of same-gender romantic affection" (Booth, et al. 33). Books that fell into so-called "grey areas" were discussed between the researcher and VFTI to ensure all project members were in agreement about findings and analysis.

At the conclusion of this process, we had identified not just the OwnVoices picture books as originally intended, but all books which featured marginalized protagonists within the sample. Within these 35 books, we identified two sub-categories of representation of marginalized characters. The attributes of the books in these two sub-categories contribute relevant insight into how marginalized characters are portrayed by the Australian publishing industry as a collective.

A Note on Method

It is acknowledged that this project is sensitive in nature due to its goal of determining authors' and illustrators' community affiliation(s). The method used inevitably carries the risk of erasing marginalized creators who have not disclosed their identity in a source that constitutes the project's definition of a publicly-available and professional context; or misinterpreting such data. However, every effort has been made to mitigate such possibilities, including through the rigorous nature of the data collection process and ongoing discussions between the researcher and VFTI about data interpretation. Furthermore, this project was solely interested in creators who *did* publicly identify themselves as a member of a marginalized community, and all members of the project team support every individuals' right to not disclose their identities to the public. It is for this reason that the results of the project should be interpreted as indicative in nature, and demonstrative of Australian publishers' attitudes towards marginalized characters and creators.

Additionally, this method has several benefits; primarily, that it does not burden any authors or illustrators with the time commitment required to complete a survey or interview. Instead, it utilizes the information that these creators have already freely and publicly shared in professional contexts. Thus, this method is one which consolidates and re-interprets existing information. In this way, it echoes the ethos of OwnVoices, as, in Duyvis' own words:

> Nobody is under any obligation to disclose any part of their identity. Safety and privacy are essential. We're just working with the information we have; it's all we can do (Duyvis).

Additionally, it is acknowledged that the broad categories of identities used in this project—First Nations, People of Color, Queer, and disabled—are somewhat homogenizing in nature, and ordinarily more specific terms are preferable to recognize the diversity of identities within these groups. However, within the context of this study and the broader Australian publishing industry context, these aggregated categories are warranted because of the need to preserve creators' privacy and confidentiality while discussing the data in a meaningful way.

Findings: Outsider books and marginalized representation in 2018 Australian picture books

In this section, we discuss the two distinct but related sets of books within the total 35 non-OwnVoices Australian picture books that represented marginalized characters. The first sub-category is the 12 narrative-driven outsider books within the 284 Australian picture books published in 2018. These outsider picture books had a narrative that featured a marginalized protagonist, but were determined to be by creators (either non-marginalized or marginalized) who belonged to a different community from the marginalized protagonist. The second sub-category was the 23 books within the 2018 sample which featured marginalized characters but which did not have a standard narrative focus that integrated these characters' identities.

As a result, these books promoted forms of aesthetic, educational and metaphorical diversity that explicitly served a purpose other than enjoyable narratives that engaged with marginalized characters' identities.

It is emphasized that the discussion of these books is deliberately general in nature, and does not refer to, nor quote, from any specific book. It would be inappropriate and unethical in the context of this article that discusses broad trends to suggest that any individual book or creator team was somehow responsible for industry publishing trends; and doing so could endanger the well-being or livelihood of these creators. This article examines publication trends within a specific dataset, and descriptions of these categories of books can be understood to be aggregated from each specific category of books. Examining the common, shared features of these two sets of books therefore contributes to a broader understanding of how marginalized communities were represented in Australian picture books in the sample year.

1. Outsider Picture Books

In 2018, 12 Australian outsider picture books were published, containing a narrative that featured a marginalized protagonist. Four of the 12 outsider books were by a marginalized author belonging to a *different* marginalized community than the one portrayed in the book, while eight were by creator teams of which neither author nor illustrator could be identified as identifying with a marginalized community.

Of the 12 outsider books, none were by First Nations authors, and one featured illustrations by a First Nations illustrator. Two books had creators of Color (one author and two illustrators) and none of these books were by disabled creators. One outsider picture book by a Queer author was identified, but none by Queer illustrators.

[Figure 1 here]

[Figure 2 here]

We also recorded the identities represented in these outsider books. Two outsider books were about First Nations characters, eight books were about characters of Color, and two books were about disabled characters. No outsider 2018 picture books about Queer characters were identified.

[Figure 3 here]

2. Aesthetic, Educational and Metaphorical Diversity

There were 23 books which featured marginalized identities but did not have a narrative that engaged with these characters' identities in a meaningful way. We classified these into three groups based on how they did engage with diversity, which we explain below. In total, there were 13 "aesthetic diversity books", eight "educational diversity books", and two "difference books" (these category terms are further discussed below). Just five of these 23 books were by marginalized creators.

There were 4 aesthetically diverse books. Books with "aesthetic" diversity included some form of representation of marginalized identities, however the marginalized identity was included as a feature of *supporting* or background characters rather than the protagonist and thus irrelevant to the shape of the narrative (i.e. mixed-cast books, featuring characters from marginalized and non-marginalized communities). These books included visible marginalized characters, but they did not lead the story and their identity was otherwise irrelevant to the narrative. We identified that the creators of these books included one First Nations author, two First Nations illustrators, one Author of Color, and one Illustrator of Color.

[Figure 4 here]

[Figure 5 here]

There were eight books identified as including character diversity for educational reasons. In books that took an educational approach to the diversity of human identities, explaining the marginalized identity was noted as the primary focus of the book. The books provided information on the "daily life" of those who are part of a marginalized community, or promoted messages about how all communities are equal even if they are different to each other—an affirmation that, while pleasant, is inconsistent with the social and legal realities for many marginalised communities in Australia. Often, this educational focus even superseded a focus on the narrative itself, with the implied goal of promoting friendship and acceptance between individuals from different demographics. Out of these eight books, only one featured a marginalized creator, which was an Illustrator of Color.

[Figure 6 here]

There were also books identified as sharing the same goal as educationally-oriented diversity books, but which used metaphor or non-human protagonists instead of real human identities. While these books did not contain characters ordinarily recognized as marginalized, the narrative's purpose was so strikingly similar to the educational diversity books that they warranted inclusion; and as we discuss further below, the lack of explicitly human characteristics does not negate the human meaning of the books. To recognize the lack of human identity traits, we considered these to be books about "difference" rather than diversity. There were only two difference books in the sample, with both by wholly non-marginalized creator teams.

[Figure 7 here]

Discussion: The use of diverse identities for decorative and didactic purposes

Within the sample of 284 Australian children's picture books published in 2018, two unique categories of books were identified. The first category was narrative-driven books about marginalized characters that were by creators who did not share the same marginalized

identity as their protagonists. The second set of books employed diversity, however they did so for purposes unrelated to a story involving the characters' identities. This resulted in books that used marginalized identities as a decorative feature, or as educational and moral tools to facilitate children's learning. While none of these individual books are necessarily inherently problematic, within the current publishing context, and the context of this study's sample which featured so few OwnVoices books, their prominence is deserving of attention. In this section, we discuss the implications of each of these sets of books and what they may indicate about the Australian publishing industry's current approach towards marginalized creators and characters.

Outsider books about marginalized characters were represented at almost the same rate as OwnVoices books, of which there were 13 in total (Booth, et al.). Outsider books are a fraught area for diversity advocates as, while they can provide increased visual representation on the page, they do not result in an increase of power, agency or platform for the individuals *from* that community to shape their community's narratives in the literary world. Rather, these books could possibly be detrimental for potential OwnVoices creators by further limiting opportunities for them to benefit professionally, creatively or financially from narratives about their communities; for example, if publishers have recently published a book about a particular character or theme by an outsider writer, they may not wish to invest in a story they perceive to be similar by a marginalized creator. This very attitude affected the acquisitions of books by African American authors of OwnVoices young adult fiction Angie Thomas and L.L. McKinney, due to the perception that publishing multiple books by/about Black people would be a duplication of the same story (So & Wezerek).

Outsider-authored books also contain a higher degree of factual inaccuracies, implausible situations and negative depictions of marginalized people, according to research with Australian authors of OwnVoices YA fiction (Booth & Narayan, "That Authenticity is

Missing"). Thus, the publication of outsider novels at the expense of OwnVoices novels may also increase the risk that misrepresentations or stereotypes of a marginalized community become normalized and accepted as 'truths'; and these beliefs can cause direct harm to members of these communities (Kwaymullina, "We Need Diverse Books Because"). That outsider books were published at almost the same rate as OwnVoices books suggests that there is little difference in how these two categories of books are perceived by Australian publishers, despite the impact on creators and readers being significant. Had these opportunities been allocated to authors from these communities, the number of OwnVoices books in the 2018 sample would have almost doubled. While this would still be a small fraction of books within the 284 published in that year, it would have provided considerably more opportunities for marginalized creators to share their stories.

Books containing aesthetic diversity, educational diversity and stories of "difference" (23 books) were represented at almost double the rate of both OwnVoices books (13 in total) and outsider books (12 in total). This is notable because, as discussed above, the books in these three categories do not contribute the same form of representation as in OwnVoices books. In addition, like outsider books, they may also inadvertently create additional barriers to publication for authors of OwnVoices books if publishers believe they have already published a story exploring the experiences of these characters; regardless of whether the books themselves are actually similar in nature (So & Wezerek).

Australian children's literature has a history of aesthetic diversity, by framing the marginalized status of characters as "incidental to the main plot" when aiming to normalize these identities to readers (Dudek, 4). As Bishop has noted, purely aesthetic diversity can lead to "conferring a kind of invisibility" on marginalized children (46), as their identity is deliberately de-emphasized in all ways but the visual—in some cases, as Bishop noted, to the extent that the narrative would not change if the character was re-cast as part of the non-

marginalized majority demographic (35). This aesthetic diversity was most commonly observed in the mixed-cast books in this study's sample, where marginalized identity was "sprinkled" into groups of friends but never engaged with in the narrative. Rather than centering marginalized children as the protagonists—or even acknowledging these characters' identities in some way within the narrative—the marginalized status of these characters was of total irrelevance to the story.

On the contrary, educational diversity books and "difference" books presented the marginalized character as an "Other" that the (presumably outsider) reader was guided to accept or understand. This was done through the marginalized character's physical (i.e. befriending) or experiential (i.e. comparisons of daily life) proximity to non-marginalized characters, or direct instruction for the reader to celebrate "diversity" and "difference". Difference books used metaphor as a stand-in for human marginalized identities; however, as has been noted by Nikolajeva and Scott, even non-human characters are "a disguise for a human child" that grant "the creator the freedom to eliminate or circumvent several important issues that are otherwise essential in our assessment of character: those of age, gender, and social status" (89; 92). Though presumably well-intended, this pattern in educational diversity and difference books was troubling, as the books continued "centring a privileged subject" (Luke, 111) while the existence of the marginalized characters became something non-marginalized characters had to be reconciled with.

Moreover, these books demonstrated that even marginalized representation intended to be positive could contribute to a negative pattern. Fang, Fu, and Lamme state that marginalized communities often depend on "the dominant culture" for representation in entertainment media as a result of being denied agency in the systems that create this media (285). However, this is done through "imitat[ion] and simulat[ion] [of] their cultural voices" (ibid.). As is argued above and in previous scholarship, even supposedly "positive"

representations of marginalized identity by outsiders do not serve the same purpose as OwnVoices books (Kwaymullina, 26). Therefore, the aesthetic, educational and metaphorical diversity in these 23 books presented the illusion of inclusion in Australian picture books, while failing to empower marginalized people as creators and protagonists of their own narratives.

It is crucial to note that these books featuring aesthetic diversity, educational diversity, and "difference" narratives were almost exclusively by outsider creators—only five out of 23 were by a marginalized author or illustrator. This finding highlights the extent to which "[a]uthors writing outside their own cultures often intend to build awareness of cultural differences and improve intercultural relationships" (Short & Fox, 17). This is not unexpected given children's literature's long history of didacticism (Brule; Stephens; Cross; Hodge; Sheahan-Bright). However, this trend, when directed specifically towards marginalized identities, becomes a matter in need of attention in the contemporary context of advocating for industry access for marginalized authors and illustrators. Additionally, it is striking that within this sample, there are so many books that frame marginalized children as an object for acceptance or learning, and so few that center them as heroes—which is how non-marginalized characters were overwhelmingly featured in children's picture books in the sample.

The prevalence of outsider books, aesthetic diversity, educational diversity, and difference books on the Australian picture book market in 2018, when inclusive representation is under scrutiny in the mainstream, is concerning. Publishers *simultaneously* demonstrated a lack of engagement with marginalized creators through the low numbers of OwnVoices books published, despite claims of interest in the work of marginalized creators made on their publisher websites. This may indicate that publishers are using such books to create the appearance of a response to contemporary discussions about inclusion, instead of

publishing authentic narratives and/or OwnVoices books about marginalized characters. This is despite the fact that OwnVoices books typically possess a higher literary quality according to literary scholars (Bishop, 99) and authors themselves (Booth & Narayan, "The Expectations"; Booth & Narayan, "That Authenticity is Missing"). If this is the case, it would suggest that Australian publishers have not truly engaged with local or global advocacy movements for more equitable publishing practices that can increase access for marginalized authors and illustrators; but are nonetheless seeking to present the illusion of having done so.

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this article reveal two concerning trends within the sample year pertaining to the publication of books featuring marginalized characters. That outsider books and books with only aesthetic, educational, and metaphorical diversity collectively outnumbered the OwnVoices Australian children's picture books published in 2018 suggests that marginalized creators are still not being prioritized as the creators of their own stories. This limits the ability for marginalized authors and illustrators to be professionally successful and financially stable, while other creators profit from writing and illustrating books about a community they do not belong to. This is not necessarily problematic in itself; but rather, is a matter of equity when authors and illustrators who identify with these communities are underrepresented as the creators of these stories. It is also possible that Australian publishers may perceive these non-OwnVoices books as adequate substitutes for the authentic authorship and representation of OwnVoices books.

Simultaneously, these findings suggest that while publishers are aware of the global conversations about inclusive fiction for children, they have only engaged with this advocacy on a very shallow basis. Educational diversity books and difference books were observed to routinely "Other" marginalized characters for the purpose of facilitating a non-marginalized reader's acceptance of them, while aesthetically diverse picture books did not meaningfully

engage with the identities of the marginalized characters portrayed in them. The depictions of marginalized identities and experiences as only an aesthetic or decorative element of a book, or as an educational focus, creates the impression that these are the primary purposes for which these identities should exist within children's picture books. However, mainstream advocacy for inclusive children's literature is about *quality* stories which acknowledge and represent the characters' identities. Thus, the publication of these three sub-categories of books cannot be considered a genuine response to global advocacy for inclusivity by publishers. Lastly, it must be acknowledged that even when OwnVoices books and outsider books are combined with the books that only used aesthetic, educational, and metaphorical diversity, the total per centage of 2018 Australian picture books that did *not* feature a marginalized protagonist was 83%. Thus, non-marginalized representation dominated the sample year. This is indicative of broader systemic issues in the Australian publishing industry.

In examining the make-up of the non-OwnVoices "diverse" children's picture books published in Australia in 2018, it is clear that simply advocating for more on-page representation of marginalized identities is not enough to produce equitable industry change. At the same time, publisher claims that they are seeking to publish more OwnVoices books do not bear out when examining actual publishers' outputs. One way to ensure that authors and illustrators who are interested in publishing OwnVoices fiction receive this opportunity could be an annual target of acquisitions from creators of OwnVoices stories, which publishers pledge to meet ahead of time. This would guarantee access to publication for these stories, as they would not be competing with other non-OwnVoices stories in striving for publication. This is only one of many possible solutions to the current inequity in the Australian publishing industry. Nonetheless, marginalized creators should not be expected or required to produce OwnVoices stories as a condition of publication, as this would limit their

creative freedom; so this approach cannot solve other equity issues in the Australian publishing industry.

What is evident from this study is that in order to produce real change, publishers must commit to clear goals that prioritize marginalized creators. Assurances of an interest in publishing so-called "diverse books" can only be reasonably considered sincere if publishers ultimately produce these books. The findings of this study illustrate that OwnVoices books and books by outsiders serve a different purpose as literature to their readers. While the goal of increasing on-page representation is important, it should not supersede the need to facilitate industry access for marginalized authors and illustrators themselves.

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