

# Resource reviews

## *YOU, ME AND DIVERSITY: PICTUREBOOKS FOR TEACHING DEVELOPMENT AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION*

Anne M. Dolan (2014) *You, Me and Diversity: Picturebooks for teaching development and intercultural education*, London: Trentham Books.

### **Review by Marie Moriarty**

Traditionally picture books have been viewed as literary and visual fodder for children aged seven-and-under, and have long graced the shelves of early childhood education classrooms and the children's section of the local library. Bader defined the picturebook genre as an art form that 'hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page' (1976: 1). From a literary perspective, picturebooks have long been valued because of their ability to expand children's vocabulary, sentence structures and extend their sense of the world around them (Purcell-Gates, 1988). Whilst the richness and uniqueness of this literary genre lies in the interplay between illustration and text, many teachers focus on the text rather than the images. Arizpe and Styles caution against this very superficial interrogation of the text and underline the importance of teaching students to deconstruct the illustrations. They suggest 'children can become more visually literate and operate at a much higher level if they are taught how to look' (2003: 249). Additionally research on multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) has demonstrated the disjuncture that currently exists between literacy valued in schools and the current peripheral positioning of multicultural and global literacies.

*You, Me and Diversity* is a response to this current gap in educational practice. Dolan makes a very convincing case for the central place that the picturebook genre should occupy throughout the entire age-range of the primary curriculum to help children and teachers understand and read the world critically, empathically and independently. Dolan argues that

picturebooks ‘can bridge the gap between geographically distant places and the lives of children in the classroom’ (2004: 3). This very accessible book is aimed at student teachers and existing primary school practitioners who are interested in creating a culturally diverse classroom and incorporating development and intercultural perspectives through the genre of picturebooks.

Even if the teacher is a complete novice when it comes to development and intercultural education they need not fear as Dolan takes them on a comprehensive and well researched journey of discovery. Structured into eight chapters, Dolan commences by offering a detailed rationale for the book. In the first section the picturebook genre is defined and critiqued. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the genre such as Marriott’s (2002) criticism that mediated experiences can hinder a realistic and appropriate appreciation of the natural world, Dolan convincingly highlights the myriad benefits picturebooks can afford to the primary teacher who wishes to promote critical thinking and strives to bring the world into the classroom in a creative, imaginative and thought provoking way. Dolan expertly and succinctly explores the definitions, values and concepts of multicultural, intercultural and development education in the context of culture and culturally responsive teaching. This forms the foundation for Dolan’s vision of the culturally diverse classroom, a space where teachers can maximise opportunities for promoting intercultural understanding through enquiry-based learning.

Research conducted by the United Literacy Agency in 2007 revealed that despite the plethora of excellent picturebooks currently available, many teachers are unaware of what is out there. Teachers lack confidence in selecting contemporary literature for their students and they tend to rely and use books based on what they enjoyed in their own childhood (Cremin et al., 2008). As a result children are being denied access to excellent picturebooks that cover a very broad range of social themes. To address the importance of which picturebooks to select before moving on to the next stage of how to use them, Dolan offers the practitioner clear criteria

for assessing multicultural literature. In the appendices Dolan has compiled a list of available picturebooks organised into target age ranges that will assist teachers to start building a curriculum framework. A comprehensive resource section is also provided to assist school librarians, teachers and student teachers in keeping up to date with recently published high-quality picturebooks. The many resources identified include websites, YouTube clips, blogs and book awards for children's literature.

If the purpose of development education is to prepare learners to participate effectively in society, both locally and globally, with the purpose of inspiring them to bring about positive change for a more just and equal world (Fielder, 2008) then critical thinking is vital. The latter section of Dolan's book thus advocates the use of critical literacy in the classroom and a curriculum framework is offered to the teacher to allow students to critically 'read the world' (Freire and Macedo, 1987) as effectively as possible. Through a range of selected picturebooks, Dolan presents the reader with a detailed application of her curriculum framework and demonstrates how the core concepts of respect, understanding and action can be taught to address a number of development and intercultural themes such as contemporary events, gender, climate change, and displacement/refugee children.

As Dolan rightly states, 'multicultural literature is no longer an option – it is a necessity' (2014: 3) and her book makes a significant contribution to current practice. It is an essential toolkit for teachers who will feel equipped and confident to select and use picturebooks effectively to examine complex global issues in a fun and creative manner in the primary classroom. It will enable teachers to design activities that move beyond the realm of mere description and maximise on the ingenuity of this genre to encourage their students to think deeper, analyse and evaluate the world around them to make a positive contribution in society as responsible citizens.

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