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Canadian Children's Literature: An Alberta Survey

This article presents the findings of an online survey administered to Alberta elementary school teachers in 2000-2001. The survey explored the teachers' knowledge and use of Canadian children's literature and their thoughts about the role of Canadian literature in elementary school classrooms. Canadian children's trade books espouse particular images and values that assist young Canadians in developing a sense of their national and personal identities. Respondents expressed their thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of using Canadian literature. Overall, most teachers appeared to be unfamiliar with contemporary Canadian books and included Canadian materials in their classroom instruction only for specific Canadian content.

Cet article présente les résultats d'une enquête en ligne effectuée auprès d'enseignants à l'élémentaire en Alberta, en 2000-2001. L'enquête portait sur les connaissances des enseignants au sujet de la littérature canadienne pour jeunes, l'usage qu'ils en faisaient et leurs avis sur le rôle de la littérature canadienne à l'élémentaire. Les ouvrages canadiens d'intérêt général publiés pour les jeunes transmettent des images et des valeurs qui aident les jeunes Canadiens à se développer une identité nationale et personnelle. Les répondants se sont exprimés sur les bienfaits et les désavantages d'employer la littérature canadienne. De façon générale, la majorité des enseignants semblent ne pas bien connaître les livres canadiens contemporains et n'avaient recours à la littérature canadienne que pour son contenu spécifiquement canadien.

Introduction

During recent years Canadian children's literature, especially picture books, has become increasingly multicultural and has challenged stereotypical notions of Canadian identity. Although Canadian children's literature has a relatively short history, there is now a wide range of quality Canadian books—nonfiction and fiction, picture books and junior novels—available for young readers. Saltman (2003) writes, "The children's literature of a nation is a

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microcosm of that country's literary and sociocultural values, beliefs, themes, and images, including those of geography, history, and identity." The verbal and visual aspects of Canadian books create particular representations of what it means to be Canadian, and they offer a variety of approaches to cultural difference (Lewis, 2001). McKenzie (2003) believes that literature targeted at children is of particular importance because "the images used usually replicate the popular social values and moral attitudes of the times and of the culture, often without the realization that the child is unconsciously absorbing these values and attitudes from the images presented" (pp. 201-202).

The research project we report here had three objectives: (a) to examine the extent to which Canadian children's literature is incorporated into Alberta school library collections, (b) to explore Alberta elementary school teachers' knowledge of Canadian children's literature, and (c) to determine whether Alberta teachers incorporate Canadian children's literature into their classroom teaching and learning activities. Data were collected through a Web-based survey instrument administered to elementary school teachers in the province during the 2000-2001 school year. In this article we report only the findings relating to the second and third objectives of the study. Findings relating to the first objective are reported elsewhere (Bainbridge, Carbonaro, & Wolodko, 2002; Carbonaro, Bainbridge, & Wolodko, 2002).

Specific research questions were:

1. What children's literature do Alberta elementary teachers currently use in their classrooms?
2. Are elementary school teachers in Alberta familiar with the work of Canadian children's authors and illustrators?
3. Are Alberta elementary teachers familiar with the work of Alberta children's authors and illustrators?
4. Do elementary school teachers in Alberta use Canadian literature in their teaching?
5. Do elementary school teachers in Alberta believe it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching?

Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

The research was predicated on the understanding that all literature is ideological and that Canadian children's literature, either implicitly or explicitly, espouses particular images and values from which young Canadians develop a sense of their Canadian identity and their role in the larger world (Saltman, 2003). Leading theorists in literacy education focus increasingly on the social and political contexts and practices of reading. They argue for *active citizenship* as a component of critical social literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 1997), emphasizing the need for a citizenry that accepts and is comfortable with difference. Included among the goals of active citizenship are "the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in a democratic society within an international context" (Lankshear & Knobel, p. 98). We believe that Canadian books, in addition to books from around the world, play an important role in helping students understand who they are in relation to each other.

The contexts of literacy instruction (or indeed any instruction) are not neutral. In discussing critical social literacy, Luke (1997) maintained that educators need to understand "how the public texts of everyday life construct our understanding of the world, and position persons to take up various social, political and cultural identities" (p. 20). Developing a critical understanding of how texts position individual readers in relation to ideas and attitudes can help teachers and students to understand their own positions in constructing meaning and can perhaps help them to see their own lives differently. What values are embedded in the books Canadian children read? Whose voices are represented in that literature? Whose voices are omitted? Whose version of histories, cultures, and values count? Through being conscious of the underlying values reflected in the literature they select, it is possible that teachers can help their students to understand some of the complex issues they will face in their lives.

In Canada large numbers of immigrants arrive from all parts of the globe every year, bringing with them diverse world views and cultural ways. A total of 228,575 new immigrants came to Canada in 2002. For the fifth consecutive year China was the leading source of immigrants to Canada, accounting for about 15% of the year's total. The second and third largest source countries were India and Pakistan. Other countries included in the top 10 sources of immigration were Philippines, Iran, and the Republic of Korea (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003). The continually shifting profile of Canadian society makes it imperative that Canadians regularly review their perceptions of who they are and what it means to be Canadian in an international context.

Canada prides itself on its "cultural pluralism" where the importance of accepting different races, ethnicities, languages, and cultures is well recognized. Canada's Multiculturalism Policy, adopted by Parliament in 1971, aims to recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and historic contribution to Canadian society. The Act strives to enhance the development of such communities and promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins. This applies equally to Canada's Aboriginal people.

A nation's literature has historically been seen as a reflection of the values, tensions, myths, and psychology that identify a national character. Anderson (1991) defines a nation as "an imagined community" (p. 6). He maintains that the members of a nation never know each other, meet each other, or hear each other, yet they hold in common an image of who they are as individuals in community with each other. Undoubtedly one of the building blocks of national identity is literature. Corse (1997) writes that literature is "an integral part of the process by which nation-states create themselves and distinguish themselves from other nations" (p. 7).

Until the mid-20th century, Canadian identity was seen as an amalgam of blurred French, British, and American values and cultures. English-speaking Canadians saw themselves as an integral part of the British Empire, and as Lower (1958) said, children were "steeped in the liquid of imperialism" (p. 350). Over time Canada developed increasingly important ties to the United States. Nationalism in and of itself was regarded as somehow suspect, and no attempt was made to delineate the parameters of an indigenous Canadian

identity (Richardson, 2001). Davey (1993) referred to Canada at that time as a “state invisible to its own citizens” (p. 3).

Most of the school texts available until the 1980s, as well as the Canadian children’s trade books in print at that time, projected a single voice that helped to repress any knowledge of difference. All readers were assumed to be white, Christian, and native speakers of English or French. A definite us-them tension was present “privileging one perspective and repressing all others with its particular talk on ethnicity, race and gender” (Johnston, 2000). There were few references in the literature to Aboriginal Canadians, to French Canadians, and certainly not to immigrant groups other than the British.

During the latter part of the 20th century, important developments in critical and cultural theory “necessitated an altered set of strategies for reading and responding to Canada’s self-representational acts” (Heble, 1997, p. 87). These developments include a view of literature in a postcolonial framework that encompasses multicultural perspectives, thereby allowing for new voices to emerge in the literature itself. Many contemporary Canadian authors and illustrators such as Paul Yee, Michael Kusugak, and George Littlechild present points of view from a diverse range of historically prevalent cultures and ethnicities, and they draw on more than one cultural repertoire. They “speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspectives of another, and finding ways of being both the same as and different from the others among which they live” (Johnston, 2000). Increasingly, Canadian children’s literature is finding a voice that is unique and clearly “postcolonial,” and it stirs debate over issues such as the inclusion of minority cultures’ literature and histories in the mainstream curriculum.

It seems particularly important, then, that Canadian teachers know about contemporary Canadian books and make every effort to include a multiplicity of voices in the literature they choose to share with their students. The theoretical and historical perspective presented above guided the development of the key research questions and the specific items in the questionnaire (see Appendix for a sample of questions from the survey).

Related Survey Research

Few surveys of teachers’ knowledge and use of Canadian literature have been conducted. The Writers’ Trust of Canada (Baird, 2002) surveyed the English-language Canadian literature currently taught in Canadian high schools. Findings from the study indicated that most book selections made by teachers were based on the availability of texts (books the school already owns), acceptability (provincial guidelines, community standards, and the interests of students), and the consensus of the school’s English department. Baird reported opposing camps about the legitimacy of teaching Canadian literature in schools.

One group believes that teaching Canadian literature is part of a good education and “good citizenship”—we must be the “only country in the world that doesn’t teach its own literature in its schools.” There are others who maintain that the nationality of the author is not important; “Nationalism and nationalist agenda and the cultural value of literature are mutually exclusive” (p. 3)

Baird concluded that Canadian high school teachers needed better access to material about Canadian literature, that there was limited knowledge about Canadian writers and the Canadian publishing scene even among teachers who are supportive of Canadian literature, and that there was significant competition from US and British literature.

Also in 2002, a survey was conducted with 1,027 Ontario elementary school teachers to determine whether they used children's literature in their classrooms, and if so, which authors and illustrators they selected (Pantaleo, 2002). The survey participants accessed mainly US literature. However, 70% of the teachers in the study were able to name a Canadian author and/or illustrator and in total mentioned 113 different individuals. Pantaleo concluded that the respondents' knowledge and use of Canadian children's literature was limited, as was their knowledge of book selection tools and resources.

Method

A team of researchers and doctoral students developed the survey instrument used in this study. The team defined the content and direction of the survey and developed the specific questions. The survey was first pilot tested as a pencil-and-paper instrument in a graduate-level elementary education class. A professor from the School of Library and Information Studies as well as Education faculty members and doctoral students critiqued a second paper version of the survey instrument. A third version of the survey was reviewed by a senior professor in research and measurement. A fourth version of the survey instrument was put on the Web, and a second pilot was administered in one of the computer labs on campus at the university. The respondents were teachers enrolled in a graduate course in elementary education. The instrument was again modified so that the look and feel of the survey was better suited to a Web-based format. At this point the survey was deemed appropriate for use with the larger population.

The population of interest was defined as all elementary schools in the province of Alberta. Letters were mailed to all 62 school districts requesting the participation of their elementary schools. Of these, two declined to participate and six did not respond even after a second letter of enquiry. In all, 53 jurisdictions gave consent for participation in the research project. These districts varied in size from four to 131 elementary and middle schools. Many districts covered large rural areas of the province, whereas others were compact city school districts. All schools in consenting jurisdictions were contacted either by e-mail, letter, or fax. The larger jurisdictions requested contact by letter only. The total number of schools contacted was 980; of these, 35 schools could not be reached. Thus a total of 945 schools were invited to participate in the research project.

From these schools, 284 school principals responded; 275 volunteered their consent for participation. Canadian Tri-Council ethical guidelines demand that only schools providing consent are allowed to participate in research studies. To make our participant selection purposeful (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), we asked the principals to invite one teacher (a person with a special interest or responsibility in language arts and/or school libraries) to participate in the study. We believed that in order for respondents to address the research questions, it was important that they had some interest in, and knowledge of,

children's literature as well as a sense of the role of the school library and the multiple roles of the teacher-librarian. After our first request, we received 110 completed surveys (i.e., 40% return rate). Subsequent follow-up communication increased the response rate to 170 completed surveys, a return rate of 62%. Fifty-four percent of the respondents taught kindergarten through grade 3. Forty-six percent taught grades 4-6.

The survey was a self-administered questionnaire designed as an online form. Open form questions required respondents to type a short answer into a text box on the form (e.g., book author's name, or the respondent's ideas regarding a specific issue). On completion of the questionnaire, respondents clicked a *submit* button and received a message on the survey Web page indicating that the data had been received by the Web server and had been stored as an individual record in the database.

The survey data were analyzed descriptively. Graphs and tables were produced to summarize the numerical data. The open form responses were summarized in accordance with the survey questions.

Results

Because we deliberately invited teachers with a special interest in children's literature or school libraries to participate, we can surmise that the teachers completing the survey were some of the best-informed elementary teachers in Alberta (35 respondents, or 20%, identified themselves as being, or having been at some point, a teacher-librarian).

To address the first research question (what children's literature do Alberta elementary teachers currently use in their classrooms?) respondents were asked to recall the literature they had used in their classrooms during the previous year. They were asked to list what they believed were their students' three most enjoyed authors, their own three most enjoyed children's authors, and from their observations of the students' reading selections the three most read authors in their classrooms. In total the teachers listed 229 authors from Canada, the US, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden. By far the most frequently listed authors, however, were US. Table 1 presents the 10 authors most popular with the children (as reported by their teachers), the ten most popular with the teachers and the 10 whose work was most read in the classrooms.

In addressing the second research question (are elementary school teachers in Alberta familiar with the work of Canadian children's authors and illustrators?) respondents were asked to name their favorite *Canadian* authors and illustrators. The teachers demonstrated their knowledge of the work of Canadian authors and illustrators by naming 59 individuals. However, 73 of the 170 respondents (43%) did not name a Canadian author or illustrator, and two teachers listed authors who were not Canadian (US authors Gary Paulsen and Jan Brett). Those who did list names were most familiar with the work of well-publicized and established writers such as Farley Mowat, Robert Munsch, and Phoebe Gilman. The names of notable contemporary award-winning Canadian authors and illustrators (such as Kenneth Oppel, Tim Wynne-Jones, Paul Morin, and Brian Deines) were either rarely mentioned or not mentioned at all in the survey responses. Table 2 presents the names of the eight Canadian

Table 1
Top 10 Favorite Authors in Elementary Classrooms

<i>Children's favorites</i>		<i>Teachers' favorites</i>		<i>Most read in classrooms</i>	
Robert Munsch	35	Eric Carle	22	Robert Munsch	26
Eric Carle	22	Phoebe Gilman	21	Eric Carle	23
Jan Brett	15	Robert Munsch	18	Roald Dahl	15
Roald Dahl	14	Jan Brett	15	Jan Brett	14
Paulette Bourgeois	13	Roald Dahl	14	Beverly Cleary	14
Phoebe Gilman	13	Paulette Bourgeois	11	Paulette Bourgeois	13
Gary Paulsen	12	Gary Paulsen	9	Phoebe Gilman	10
Marc Brown	10	Lois Lowry	9	Tomi de Paola	9
J.K. Rowling	10	Tomie dePaola	8	Gary Paulsen	9
R.L. Stine	10	J.K. Rowling	6	Patricia MacLachlan	6

Note. Numbers indicate the number of times a name was cited by respondents.

authors and illustrators mentioned most frequently by the respondents (after this the names were listed only once each).

In addressing the third research question (are Alberta elementary teachers familiar with the work of Alberta children's authors and illustrators?) the survey asked respondents to name Alberta authors and illustrators whose work they used in their classrooms. Although 23 Alberta authors and three Alberta illustrators were named in total, Table 3 lists only the seven most popular names. The remaining 16 names were each listed only once by respondents. Because books are listed according to author or author-illustrator, the names of authors and author-illustrators are likely to appear more frequently than those of individuals who illustrate only. It is not surprising, then, that teachers could recall only three specific Alberta illustrators' names, especially as only a dozen or so well-known Alberta illustrators are publishing at present. Ninety-four of the 170 respondents (55%) did not name an Alberta author or illustrator.

Table 2
Top Eight Favorite Canadian Authors and Illustrators

<i>Canadian authors</i>		<i>Canadian illustrators</i>	
Robert Munsch	17	Barbara Reid	15
Phoebe Gilman	12	Michael Martchenko	11
Monica Hughes	8	Georgia Graham	7
Sheree Fitch	6	Ian Wallace	7
Farley Mowat	5	Ted Harrison	5
Cora Taylor	5	Brenda Clark	3
Ian Wallace	4	Paul Morin	2
Jean Little	4	Phoebe Gilman	2

Note. Numbers indicate the number of times a name was cited by respondents.

In answering the fourth research question (do elementary school teachers in Alberta use Canadian literature in their teaching?), 148 of the 170 respondents (87%) indicated that they incorporated Canadian literature into their classroom teaching. Sixteen respondents (9%) indicated that they were not sure whether the materials they used were Canadian, and six (3%) said they did not use Canadian literature. However, in response to question 2 (Are elementary teachers in Alberta familiar with the work of Canadian children’s authors and illustrators?) only 57% listed the name of a Canadian author or illustrator; 43% could not recall the specific names of any Canadian authors or illustrators.

In addressing the fifth research question (do elementary school teachers in Alberta believe it is important to use Canadian literature in their teaching?) 165 respondents (97%) said they believed it was important, and five said it was not important. Text boxes were provided for teachers to answer two questions: “What do you believe are the advantages of using Canadian children’s literature?” and “What do you believe are the disadvantages of using Canadian children’s literature?” The following section summarizes the responses to these questions under two headings, advantages and disadvantages.

The Advantages of Including Canadian Literature in Classroom Activities

Advantages listed by the teachers included Canadian content and its fit with mandated curricula; the relevance of the literature to students’ lives and experiences; issues of culture, identity, and history; the inspiration and role-modeling provided by local authors and illustrators; and the quality of Canadian children’s literature.

Canadian Content and Curriculum Fit

Sixty-four of the 170 survey respondents (38%) stated that the Canadian content in Canadian literature was important to them. They mainly valued Canadian literature as a vehicle for introducing students to content that was “close to home” and that had a “Canadian point of view.” Twenty-seven of these 64 respondents (42% of the 64 respondents) mentioned that the recognizable Canadian settings presented in the descriptive text and in the detailed illustrations portrayed a realistic view of the landscape and helped students to identify with various regions and locations in their own country. These respondents went on to explain that classroom discussions about books were more

Table 3
Favorite Alberta Authors and Illustrators

<i>Alberta authors</i>		<i>Alberta illustrators</i>	
Monica Hughes	13	Georgia Graham	21
Martin Godfrey	9	Barbara Hartman	1
Cora Taylor	7	William Roy Brownridge	1
Tololwa Mollé	7		
Sigmund Brouwer	6		
Carol Vaage	5		
Hazel Hutchins	3		

Note. Numbers indicate the number of times a name was cited by respondents.

relevant when the students could relate to the incidents in the stories, to the weather, to places and place names, to the activities the characters engaged in, and to the problems they faced.

The emphasis on Canadian content also appeared to be important to the 17 respondents (10%) who connected literature directly to topics in the Curriculum/Programs of Studies. They viewed Canadian literature as a resource for reinforcing curriculum content and curriculum themes. These 17 respondents reported that Canadian literature lent itself to thematic work as it could often be integrated into several subject areas. Their responses indicated that Canadian literature was most useful in meeting learners' expectations in the areas of social studies (especially with historical fiction) and science.

Overall, teachers viewed Canadian literature as a way to expose students to the voice of their own country, which they believed would engender a better understanding and appreciation of Canada "as its own country with a rich history" (survey response). For example, one teacher noted, "It saves having to give quick courses on American history and geography. I'd rather spend the time teaching [the students] about other parts of Canada." This point was supported by other respondents who believed that Canadian literature was effective in helping students learn about other areas of their province or other areas of Canada. There was a general belief that the geographic and social settings of the literature provided relevant and realistic examples of Canadian political problems and concerns. Furthermore, the literature provided accurate Canadian contextual information, for example, the metric system (distances, mass, etc.), and events (such as Canada Day).

Relevance to Students' Lives and Experiences

Fifty-seven respondents (34%) believed that contemporary Canadian books helped students to understand what it means to be Canadian. These respondents mentioned that Canadian literature was of particular relevance to their students' lives and experiences. Furthermore, these teachers viewed the books as appropriately reflecting Canadian life and Canadian childhood. One teacher wrote: "They are our stories and I feel they best reflect the Canadian mosaic and history." A further analysis of the 57 responses indicated that the teachers saw the words and illustrations in Canadian literature as presenting realistic and familiar topics and characters to their readers. They maintained that students readily identified with them. Where differences exist between the students' own experiences and those of the characters or the events of a story, the differences were acknowledged by teachers as an opportunity for children to learn more about Canada and Canadians.

More specifically, the survey responses indicated that teachers perceived the vocabulary used in the literature as *Canadian*—a common language and usage specific to Canada—and they believed students could relate to the expressions used by the authors and by the characters in the stories. Teachers noted that in reading Canadian literature the students were able to connect references in the stories to their personal knowledge and backgrounds, thus scaffolding further meaning-making.

Culture, Identity, and History

Thirty-seven respondents (22%) believed that Canadian literature assisted students in learning Canadian culture, instilling a positive sense of self-esteem and developing a strong Canadian identity. By using literature that portrays Canadian culture, customs, and holidays, the teachers saw the books as tools to separate Canadian from US culture and media. According to these 37 respondents, helping children to understand that Canadians are different and special is an important role for Canadian children's literature. It helps students to feel that "it is okay to be Canadian." The respondents also emphasized that Canadian literature was a vehicle for fostering a sense of pride in being Canadian.

Exposure to books that promote or present Canadian history, customs, values, and traditions (what some respondents referred to as "the stories and legends of the Canadian mosaic") enables students to learn about, enjoy, and appreciate their Canadian heritage. The 37 teachers believed that celebrating being Canadian and developing a sense of patriotism were important aspects of Canadian life. Part of this celebration consists of developing an increased awareness and understanding of Canada's many cultures. The teachers believed that children became aware of their own diverse culture through stories and illustrations, especially through literature in which the examples and language are culturally appropriate.

Authors and Illustrators as Role Models and Inspiration

Books are an art form with which children are intensely familiar, and so they carry much influence. One advantage of using Canadian literature is that it offers the opportunity for local authors and illustrators to visit schools to speak to children. Meeting authors and illustrators not only presents the children with role models, but it also makes reading and studying books more interesting. Events such as author-illustrator visits and writers-in-residence in schools provide motivation for children to read and write. Forty-one respondents (42%) explained that using literature written and illustrated by Canadians presents a tangible example of the talents possessed by fellow Canadians. Young readers are intrigued when they discover that a familiar author or illustrator is Canadian, and they want to know exactly where this author or illustrator lives. Teachers elaborated by saying that when students become aware of specific Canadian authors and illustrators, they realize that Canadians can be renowned artists. Through these role models (authors and illustrators), students understand that writing and illustrating can be a viable career choice.

As well as using Canadian literature as a way to inspire students in their own writing and art, 10 respondents (6%) expressed their desire to support local authors and illustrators and the Canadian book industry in general. These teachers recognized the importance of the financial support authors and illustrators receive through book purchases, and they also recognized the importance of support through increased awareness of Canadian literature and the celebration of Canada's successful artists.

The Quality of Canadian Children's Literature

Nine of the survey respondents (5%) commented on the high level of writing that "characterizes much Canadian literature." They believed that Canadian

children's literature demonstrated the quality of Canadian publishing. One teacher wrote, "It is important for children to be aware that there are many top quality Canadian books." Another said, "There are many Canadian titles of very good/high quality being produced all across this country for children." Yet another teacher commented, "Canadian authors are very prolific and their work is appreciated all over the world."

Disadvantages of Including Canadian Literature in Classroom Activities

In addition to expressing their beliefs about the advantages of using Canadian literature in their classrooms, respondents were asked to indicate any disadvantages they perceived in working with Canadian literature in their classrooms. Comments made by the teachers included the lack of relevance of Canadian literature to much of the Alberta curriculum; the difficulty of finding Canadian literature; the teachers' familiarity (or lack of familiarity) with Canadian literature; their unwillingness to support only Canadian authors and the Canadian book industry; and the lack of quality Canadian literature. These perceptions undoubtedly affected the respondents' inclusion of Canadian literature in their classrooms.

Canadian Content and Curriculum Fit

For a variety of reasons, 20 respondents (12%) maintained that using Canadian literature as an introduction to content from a Canadian viewpoint, and using the literature for curriculum integration, was not always possible. The same respondents believed the number of Canadian resources available to support the teaching of some subjects in the Alberta *Program of Studies* was limited. They also believed that a considerable amount of Canadian literature was not relevant to the topics they taught in their classrooms. Furthermore, these respondents believed there was a limited selection of Canadian titles that supported theme or topic work, especially in covering all the concepts to be developed in each subject area. They felt that many curriculum areas were not well represented in Canadian literature. In addition, the 20 respondents said that there was an insufficient range of Canadian materials to meet the broad spectrum of students' abilities. For example, they reported that the reading level of Canadian literature was not always appropriate for the students in their classrooms.

Authors and Illustrators as Role Models and Inspiration

Twenty-two respondents (13%) emphasized that it was important to support book publishers, authors, and illustrators from around the world, not only Canadian ones. These teachers stressed that that children should be exposed to many writers, illustrators, and great books regardless of their origin. Teachers felt that by limiting variety and using only Canadian literature, they would restrict the enjoyment and appreciation young readers might find in a whole range of authors and illustrators. (The survey questions in no way suggested that teachers might restrict their book selections to Canadian materials only.) Introducing students to experiences and locations they may not be familiar with was important for these teachers, as was providing opportunities for students to experience the perspectives of non-Canadian authors and illustrators, as it would "broaden the students' minds." Two of these 22 respondents also suggested there was a danger of choosing Canadian literature for the

sake of it being Canadian and not because it was the best book for the learning purpose.

Quality of Literature

Ten respondents (6%) maintained that the quality of Canadian literature negatively affected their selection of it for use in their classrooms. These teachers felt that it was difficult to obtain good Canadian material. The teachers explained that Canadian literature could be dull and that some did not hold the children's interest. Two teachers wrote that there were better US choices, whereas two others felt that some books had been published just because they were Canadian and not because they constituted quality literature.

Availability of Relevant Canadian Literature

Sixty respondents (35%) suggested that Canadian materials were not widely available and maintained that they experienced difficulty in locating information about Canadian books. The lack of information about Canadian books created difficulties for them when they attempted to use Canadian literature in their classrooms. These respondents believed that there was a narrower selection of Canadian genres available than was available from the US. Nonfiction books and picture books were specifically mentioned in this regard. The teachers felt that Canadian literature was less available to them than US literature due partly to a lack of promotion by Canadian publishers and booksellers. They also believed that the large distributors (such as Scholastic) did not hold the rights to Canadian books. In relation to the promotion issue, teachers explained that the public is inundated with advertising from the US, which makes identifying Canadian literature difficult.

The teachers also indicated that Canadian books cost more than US books, and the resulting higher expense of building a Canadian collection was yet another disadvantage to using Canadian books in their teaching. Also, the teachers stated that Canadian literature was not always accompanied by teaching ideas and support material, which resulted in an additional incentive to choose US books that are accompanied by teachers' resource material.

Summary of Findings

The teachers who responded to the survey indicated a belief that it is important for a variety of reasons to use Canadian children's literature in elementary classrooms. However, they did not incorporate it extensively into their classroom activities. Teachers were generally not knowledgeable about Canadian books, authors, and illustrators, and when they used Canadian literature, it was used as a teaching tool rather than for enjoyment in novel studies, literature circles, or reading groups.

Five respondents (3%) said they selected Canadian material because they valued it as good literature, and one respondent selected it because it instilled a love of books and reading in students ("children simply love the books"). However, the aesthetic appeal of Canadian literature was generally of little importance to our respondents. In this sense it was evident that the teachers felt compelled to justify their decision to use Canadian literature in their classrooms based on what their students would learn from it. Canadian literature was selected because of the specific content or topic and for its teaching value. The respondents generally focused on the efferent value (Rosenblatt, 1982) of

the Canadian books they used, writing about what students can learn from the books (in a somewhat literal manner) rather than on how children can relate to the books and respond to the values, attitudes, and world views presented in them.

In general, teachers responding to the survey had little knowledge of contemporary Canadian authors and illustrators, and they were not well informed about the resources they could use to find information about Canadian books.

Conclusions and Discussion

The conclusions of our survey fully support the findings of the Writers' Trust of Canada survey conducted in 2002 (Baird, 2002). The teachers in our study expressed a similar need for more readily available information about Canadian authors and illustrators and about new books (especially nonfiction). They spoke of the need for teaching ideas when integrating literature across the curriculum and for help in selecting Canadian novels for novel studies, literature circles, and readers' workshops. They did not mention the use of Canadian literature for their students' reading pleasure.

Our findings also support those of the Pantaleo (2002) study conducted in Ontario. The lists of favorite authors and illustrators are almost identical in the two studies, as is the finding that elementary school teachers in general are not well informed about Canadian children's literature. Our teachers said that they needed help in knowing which good Canadian books were available and which writers and illustrators to watch for. The teachers indicated a belief that Canadian literature was important. The problem seemed to be in accessing the literature and in finding information and teaching suggestions for their classrooms. It is important to note here the difficulties that Canadian publishers encounter in trying to compete with the resources and distribution opportunities offered by larger publishing houses. It should not come as a surprise that overextended teachers and teacher-librarians select US and/or UK books that offer resources and easy access rather than the less well-advertised Canadian literature that generally does not include supporting teacher resources.

It is accepted that Canadian children's literature reflects and transmits Canadian culture (Saltman, 2003) and that it can play a role in shaping national identity (Corse, 1997). In addition, much Canadian children's literature is recognized by scholars and critics as being of high literary quality. The teachers in our study had some understanding of the potential of Canadian children's literature for providing a starting point in classrooms for discussion about Canadian identity and Canadian issues. However, their responses to questions about the advantages and disadvantages of using Canadian literature did not demonstrate a conscious awareness that all literature is written by a particular person, in a particular place, at a particular time in history. That being said, the survey did not directly ask the teachers to think about Canadian children's books as a means to raise awareness of race, culture, power, and identity. Nor did it ask teachers to think about which stories and whose voices were being heard and not heard. These issues could be investigated in a more focused follow-up study.

Every piece of children's literature, through its text and illustrations, has the potential to shape or influence a reader's thinking. Reading and exploring literature can open a public space where conversations among various voices

can take place. In these spaces Canadian children might recognize reflections of their own identity, and they might also come to see the complexities inherent in issues of power and social justice, and of the ideologies presented through books and the popular media. The teachers in our study did not consider book selection in terms of the ideology presented in the various texts. Books were not viewed or deliberately selected as ways to enter conversations and explorations about critical issues regarding society, culture, and identity.

The survey results left us with many questions, some of which we intend to take up in the future with teachers from across Canada. Our respondents did not mention their students reading for pleasure, even though questions on the survey asked about the presence of a classroom book collection and about the books the students selected for free reading. Could it be that teachers are so pressured for time that they focus only on how books can be used to teach—not on the aesthetic experience of reading, or on the big ideas literature contains and that challenge us to think in new ways? Survey respondents frequently named specific Canadian picture books and their creators, but infrequently mentioned novels. This is an interesting finding given that 46% of the teacher respondents taught grades 4-6. One would expect these teachers to include novels (as well as picture books) in their classroom reading activities. It raises the question as to whether teachers themselves are readers. Do they read novels written for students in the upper elementary grades? Do they read novels aloud to their students? Do they know about Canadian authors who are currently writing for this age group? We need to know if teacher education programs in Canada adequately prepare teachers to make informed book selections on behalf of their students and whether there is a focus on Canadian materials.

From the number of teachers in our survey who were unable to list Canadian authors and illustrators, we believe that the “imagined community” Alberta children generally encounter through the books they read in elementary school is not Canadian. It appears that little of their own culture and country is reflected in the books students read. Unlike previous generations of Canadians who grew up with local radio, local newspapers, local television, and magazines such as *Maclean's*, contemporary Alberta children probably encounter a predominance of non-Canadian content on a daily basis. They watch cable television and movies, read magazines from around the world, and access the Internet. Although clearly many benefits derive from these media sources, we wonder how Alberta children’s developing identities and their ability to be active citizens of Canada are affected by such influences. How do Alberta students become aware of the contemporary nature of Canada and of Canadians? How do they learn that all nations have an identity and that the cultural artifacts of a nation reflect that identity? We believe that Canadian children need opportunities to explore what it means to be Canadian and to discover the various ways they can take part as active citizens in the life of Canada and in a global community.

We recommend that teacher education programs in Canada encourage preservice teachers to question their taken-for-granted notions about children’s literature and introduce them to the best Canadian children’s fiction and non-fiction available. In addition, we can encourage prospective teachers to view

literacy in the broadest possible way. Teaching literacy is not only about teaching children *how* to read and write, it is also about helping students to become critical thinkers, able to explore the values and points of view presented in books from around the world.

We also recommend that practicing teachers facilitate their students' participation in Canadian society as active citizens by raising their own critical awareness of the children's literature they select for inclusion in their classroom programs. The books children read today affect their perceptions of themselves in relation to others in the world, and they have the potential to shape expectations for an individual's future actions on the world stage.

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Appendix

Sample Questions From the Children's Literature Survey, 2001

We would like to ask you some questions about the trade books you use in your classroom. These are books you can buy from a bookseller or via the Internet, and not the textbooks you use with your students. As you answer these questions, please focus on the grade level(s) you taught during the last school year (2000-2001).

1. Which authors did your students enjoy most last year? Please list the top three:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d. I choose not to respond to this item
2. Which 3 authors did you enjoy the most in your classroom last year?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d. I choose not to respond to this item
3. Which 3 authors did you use the most in your classroom last year?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d. I choose not to respond to this item
4. Did you read aloud from trade books to your students last year?
Yes
No
I choose not to respond to this item
5. Did you use Canadian children's literature in your classroom teaching?
Yes
No
Not sure
I choose not to respond to this item.
6. If you used Canadian literature, in what subject areas did you use it last year?
Language Arts
Social Studies
Math
Science
Art
Other (please specify)
None
I choose not to respond to this item.
7. Do you have a favourite Canadian children's author?
Yes (name)
No
Not sufficiently familiar with Canadian authors to comment.
I choose not to respond to this item
8. Do you have a favourite Canadian book illustrator?
Yes (name)
No
Not sufficiently familiar with Canadian illustrators to comment.
I choose not to respond to this item
9. Do you have a favourite Alberta author?
Yes (name)

- No
I choose not to respond to this item
10. Do you have a favourite Alberta illustrator?
Yes (name)
No
I choose not to respond to this item
11. Do you make a point of using books by Canadian authors?
Yes
No
Please explain your response:
I choose not to respond to this item
12. Do you have a book collection in your own classroom from which children can borrow books to read at home (not your personal book collection)?
Yes
No
I choose not to respond to this item
13. If you have your own classroom book collection, give examples of three Canadian titles in the collection.
One:
Two:
Three:
Not sure about any specific titles
I choose not to respond to this item
14. Do you think it is important to use Canadian literature in your classroom?
Yes
No
I choose not to respond to this item
15. Are you familiar with the Canadian Children's Book Centre?
Yes
No
I choose not to respond to this item
16. Are you familiar with the Young Alberta Book Society?
Yes
No
I choose not to respond to this item
17. Did your school host an author/illustrator in the last 2 years?
Yes (name of author/illustrator)
No
I choose not to respond to this item
18. What are the strengths of using Canadian literature (trade books) in your teaching?
19. What are the disadvantages of using Canadian trade books in your teaching?