

2015

## Picturebooks in Teacher Education: Eight Teacher Educators Share their Practice

Nicola Daly

*University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, nicolad@waikato.ac.nz*

Marilyn M. Blakeney-Williams

*University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, marilyn@waikato.ac.nz*

---

### Recommended Citation

Daly, N., & Blakeney-Williams, M. M. (2015). Picturebooks in Teacher Education: Eight Teacher Educators Share their Practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(3).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v40n3.6>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol40/iss3/6>

## **Picturebooks in Teacher Education: Eight Teacher Educators Share their Practice.**

Nicola Daly  
Marilyn Blakeney-Williams  
University of Waikato, New Zealand

*Abstract: There is a great deal of contemporary research demonstrating the effective use of picturebooks in the classroom; however, there are few studies recording perceptions and use of picturebooks in Initial Teacher Education [ITE]. This study explores the reported use of picturebooks within a New Zealand university-based ITE degree programme. The data discussed in this article was collected using semi structured interviews with eight teacher educators from different learning areas of the New Zealand Curriculum. In order to unpack the power of using picturebooks as part of teacher preparation a discussion of why and how picturebooks are used by teacher educators is presented. These themes include modeling pedagogy for future teachers; dealing with negative attitudes to certain curriculum areas; plugging gaps in pre-service teacher knowledge among others.*

### **Introduction**

Bader (1976) defines a picturebook in the following way:

A picturebook is a text, illustrations, total design, an item of manufacture and a commercial product, a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of turning the page. (p.1)

This article presents qualitative research on how eight New Zealand pre-service teacher educators describe and understand their use of picturebooks in their initial teaching education programmes. Our findings support the premise that children's picturebooks are complex and powerful pedagogical tools in preservice teacher education.

While there is not a great deal of existing literature concerning the use of picturebooks in preservice teacher education, a plethora of literature exists about the use of picturebooks in classrooms, suggesting that picturebooks can be useful in many curriculum areas for many purposes (e.g., Cho & Jeung, 1998; Hsaio, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Pantaleo, 2008; Sneddon, 2009; Taliaferro, 2009). For example, Pantaleo worked with Canadian children in classrooms using post modern picturebooks and her findings showed the children developed strong visual literacy skills. Hsaio (2010) examined how effective the use of picturebooks was in working with children's creative thinking and drawing. Her study was conducted with 27 children aged between 4 and 5, in a Korean kindergarten setting, over a period of 16 weeks. Through observational records and parent questionnaires, Hsaio found that overall the use of picturebooks led to a significant improvement in children's reading and drawing behaviours. The children were seen to benefit from talking about the artwork within

the picturebooks and parents commented that the children were creating their own artworks at home more often, and using a greater variety of tools and techniques, because of their exposure to, and discussions about the art in the picturebooks.

In her exploration of the use of picturebooks to teach Mathematics concepts in Australian schools, Jenkins (2010) suggests that the greatest benefit is that the picture book provides a real life context for learning: it makes the learning relevant for children. Her article aims to show “how easily a quality picture book can stimulate mathematical discussion, introduce and develop abstract concepts and lead into relevant and interesting mathematical activities” (p.28). Cho and Jeung (1998) also discuss the use of picturebooks to teach science concepts to preschool aged children in Korea. They provide 7 reasons for why they consider the use of picturebooks to be effective in teaching science to young children including improving children’s attitudes towards science, providing them with a broader view of what constitutes science, and providing a platform for the integration of science and literature.

Taliaferro (2009) describes her use of picturebooks to heighten her secondary school students’ understanding of another culture. She used the books to ‘paint a picture’ of Africa for her students, before they began studying a novel which was set there. Taliaferro suggests that within the pages of a picture book can exist some hugely complex ideas. She says that picturebooks can help older students “learn to navigate a complex world in meaningful ways” (p.35). Sneddon’s (2009) work creating bilingual picturebooks with immigrant children in London showed the power of creating and translating picturebooks for allowing the children to bring more of themselves in terms of both culture and language into the classroom. Blakeney-Williams & Daly (2013) examined the use of picturebooks in two New Zealand culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms and found that the teachers were using picturebooks across the curriculum in a range of ways to draw on the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

However, despite the substantial body of literature concerning the use of picturebooks in school settings, there appear to be only a few studies examining the use of picturebooks in tertiary education settings, specifically teacher education. Myerson (2006) examined the use of picturebooks as a tool for teaching basic theories of learning and development to 77 American undergraduate education majors who were white middle class students with a mean age of 21 years. Students voluntarily rated the use of picturebooks as part of an overall course appraisal online. In open ended questions the students stated that the use of picturebooks helped to make theories of learning and development understandable, provided examples of children’s literature that they could use, gave concrete examples of ideas being discussed in class, and helped them to understand the place of children’s literature. In fact, the use of picturebooks was rated significantly more highly than any other aspect of the course.

More recently, Johnston & Bainbridge (2013) have published a set of 8 studies concerning the use of picturebooks in teacher education settings. Eight university teacher educators and four doctoral students examined the response of 1108 pre-service teachers to 80 Canadian picturebooks at six teacher education sites across Canada with a specific focus on using picturebooks to explore issues of diversity including questions of race, culture, gender and power (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013). One of these studies by Johnston and Shariff (2013) of Albertan secondary pre-service teachers working with the 80 Canadian picturebooks showed that most participants felt a level of discomfort using picturebooks dealing with controversial topics (concerning race, culture, gender, sexual orientation and discrimination) or ‘difficult knowledge’. Overall results from the 8 Canadian studies showed ‘the value of introducing pre-service teachers to the potential of diverse picturebooks as an aspect of critical literacy in their classrooms, and to the crucial role of teacher educators in creating space and safety for pre-service teachers to explore the issues raised by the books.’ (p. 178).

Thus, there is some evidence that picturebooks are useful tools in a tertiary education setting (Myerson, 2006) and in teacher education in particular (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013) but there does not appear to be any research about how picturebooks may be used across a range of curriculum areas in teacher education. Therefore, it is hoped that the proposed study will provide a unique contribution to research in teacher education.

The research questions for this study were 1) 'Why do teacher educators choose to use picturebooks?' and 2) 'How are picturebooks being used in teacher education?'

## **Teacher Education in New Zealand**

New Zealand's teacher education involves either an undergraduate three or four year degree (primary and early childhood education) or a one-year graduate diploma (early childhood, primary and secondary). Teacher education is available in both English medium and te reo Māori (the Māori language) which reflects the languages of instruction used in New Zealand schools. The process of teacher education is overseen and regulated by the New Zealand Teachers' Council which has responsibility for approving and monitoring all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in New Zealand (Ell, 2011). There are 15 providers for primary teachers and nine providers of secondary ITE providing 47 different qualifications in total (Ell, 2011). The first two years of service after Degree status are completed as provisionally registered teachers, and after two years of continuous service the teacher will produce a portfolio to present to the New Zealand Teachers' Council. This shows they have met the registered criteria as defined by the Council (Ell, 2011). The focus of this study is initial teacher education based at a New Zealand university which offers both graduate diplomas and undergraduate degrees in teaching.

## **Method**

After ethical approval was obtained from the authors' institution, an invitation was sent out to 70 teacher educators in the authors' faculty asking for volunteers who used picturebooks to be interviewed about their perceptions of and practice in using picturebooks in their teacher education. Eight volunteers came forward and were interviewed on a one-to-one basis using a semi structured schedule of questions. Participants chose the location for their interview which was either the researcher's or participant's office. Interview times ranged from 27-45 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcriptions were sent to participants for their corrections and approval before analysis.

Analysis was conducted by identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis allowed us to examine the data set so we could determine the intricacies of meaning, implicit and explicit within the data. An initial analysis of the transcripts, identifying possible themes in relation to the two research questions was done by each of the researchers independently. Themes identified were compared and discussed, resulting in the identification of four themes for each research question. Researchers then coded the transcripts based on these themes, and checks of the coding between the two researchers were completed. No pre-existing model or frame was used to determine themes.

**Participants**

The eight participants interviewed were all female and were experienced teacher educators whose years in teacher education ranged from 7 to 25 years (see Table 1). There was a range of curriculum areas covered.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Years in Teacher Education</b>
Anne	Mathematics	20
Cherie	Visual arts	15
Demelza	Innovations in education	23
Ellen	Mathematics	15
Jane	Drama	7
Mary	Mathematics	20+
Rosie	Science	23
Sam	Literacy	15

**Table 1: Curriculum area and teacher education experience of participants**

**Findings and Discussion**

Findings from the interviews indicate that the eight participants used picturebooks in both tutorials and lectures. Some used picturebooks every time they taught, others used them more occasionally; some read them in their entirety, others read excerpts or placed a single illustration on a document camera. The participants found their picturebooks in many places including libraries, bookshops, and online shopping. Information about books included access to discipline-specific magazines, book reviews, children’s literature association meetings and recommendations from others. Results in relation to the two research questions will now be discussed.

**Why did teacher educators choose to use picturebooks?**

In regards to Research Question 1, analysis of interview transcripts revealed themes including accessibility, connecting with the child in the adult learner, working with negative attitudes, and plugging gaps in content knowledge.

*Accessibility*

One reason for why teacher educators chose picturebooks in teacher education related to their general accessibility. Cherie said that an important aspect of why she uses picturebooks with her students, some of whom are studying in a distance programme, is that as well as being available in local libraries ‘[e]very school has them, their families have them at home, friends, it’s there for them. And that’s why it’s so easy access for them’. The idea of access in terms of being able to find picturebooks was expanded by Mary who also discussed the power of picturebooks for making mathematical ideas accessible: ‘teaching mathematics ... hasn’t been a terribly accessible pastime for people, and so picture books are often something that most of our initial teacher education students are familiar with and it can help connect the mathematics and the literature quite readily’. This idea links to the findings of Jenkins’ (2010) work using picturebooks to teach mathematical concepts in Australian schools. Jenkins discusses picturebooks’ power coming from providing a real life context for learning.

*Re-discovering the Child Within*

Three of those interviewed spoke specifically about the power of using picturebooks in teacher education because of the link they provide to the students to rediscover the child within them. When asked why picturebooks are useful in teacher education Demelza (inclusive education) said

‘to model what they can do with children, to help them enjoy and embrace the power of picture books, ..., to open a world that they may have forgotten, because most of us, at some stage, have had picture books read to us, right? ... I don’t know how you would escape it, in your growing up. ...it re-awakens inside you, that joy of being read to, the joy of being transported to another world, and the joy of, and the power of story. And how story can touch us, how it can move us, how it can grow us, how it can educate us, how it can inspire us, how it can make us feel not alone.’

Similarly, Cherie (visual arts), discussed the importance of future teachers being reminded, through picturebooks, of being a child learner: ‘So I think if we don’t expose...our students...who are in teacher education into being that child again, as a learner, then I feel that we’re not going to make ... extraordinary teachers’. Jane (drama) expressed her belief in the importance of accessing and recognizing that picturebooks can access the souls and minds of adult teaching students, just as they do for children: ‘ the very thing that feeds children’s souls and minds when they encounter a picturebook are still present for adult teaching students, and it’s a good thing to think about that’.

*Working with Negative Attitudes*

As suggested by Cho and Jeung (1998) in relation to changing attitudes to science among Korean kindergarten students, another reason for using picturebooks in teacher education reported by the participants was for changing attitudes to particular curriculum areas, specifically for drama, mathematics, literacy, and science. One of the challenges of primary teacher education is that it must prepare future teachers to teach across the curriculum (Fraser, Aitken & Whyte, 2013), even in areas which they may not be familiar with or have not have enjoyed or found easy when they were a child in a classroom. Anne and Mary commented on this in terms of their mathematics teacher education. Anne said, ‘so in mathematics unfortunately. ... there are alarming attitudes towards mathematics. My job is two-fold, to try to turn their attitude around, so that they go out of here feeling more confident about teaching mathematics... And...to start seeing mathematics in the world around them.’

Sam cited one of the reasons she uses so many picturebooks in her literacy teacher education is her awareness that she cannot assume her students come to her with a strong reading background: ‘I need to inspire them to love books, so that they transfer that over to children’. To this end she has her students compile an ‘awesome author book’ for the full three years of their teacher education: ‘At the end of the three years they should leave with a really good range of junior/ middle/ senior books, and sophisticated picture books that they can use with students’. Gebhard (2006) discusses the importance of creating teachers who are engaged readers to model this to the children in their classrooms. She notes the fact that many undergraduate pre-service teachers are not themselves engaged readers, and the obligation of teacher education institutions to ensure that if they are not already, they become engaged readers during the course of their teacher education.

In her science teacher education Rosie finds students often lack confidence in meeting

the challenges this learning area brings. She eases them into science using storybooks. In her words, ‘ science teaching can be linked with narrative pedagogy; a way to get into science; a vehicle for science concepts and skills. I think storybooks are one of the main avenues in which I can help them to change their attitude and embrace their learning’.

Jane also discussed attitudes towards her curriculum area, drama: ‘its a big issue, sometimes I have to practically drag them in the door, some would rather be having their teeth extracted than being here.’ She continued, ‘picture books feel like a safe place to work from, for example, improvising in-character role’.

### *Plugging Gaps in Content Knowledge*

As well as choosing to use picturebooks as a way of dealing with negative attitudes or past in-experience in some learning areas, the teacher educators were also aware that the picturebooks were being chosen to simultaneously address gaps in the pre-service teachers’ existing knowledge. Mary discusses the affordances of the *Gulliver* story (retold by Beneduce, 1993) for teaching and revising the concept of scale:

Now scale, particularly three dimensional is really hard for adult students, let alone children. ...I don’t particularly like the book, but I like the illustrations. And to get the theory that you can start off with something tiny, and then if you double it all over, on each of it’s three dimensions, it ends up eight times the size of the original. And these sorts of book are brilliant for that.

Rosie commented that she uses books which cover areas she knows can be gaps in the knowledge of her pre-service science teachers: ‘... I guess that’s why I ... choose the book, because through reading this story... you are starting to fill in some of those gaps. And hopefully it’s so interesting they then want to take the initiative and find out more themselves. It ... puts them on a pathway to go and find out some more...So they’re learning some science as well as learning about pedagogy.’ These comments from Jane and Rosie align with Myerson’s (2006) comment that the power of picturebooks in teaching at a tertiary level lies in the ability of the author to, ‘like a great poet, to condense a theory to its essence’ (p. 261).

In summary the reasons for teacher educators using picturebooks in their practice revolved around the ability of a picturebook to present complex issues and concepts in a succinct and accessible manner through text and visual elements, their ability to connect with the child within the adult learner, to work with negative attitudes and to plug gaps in content knowledge.

### **How are the Picturebooks being used in Teacher Education?**

In relation to the second research question, several themes emerged from the data including modeling pedagogy; making links to community, culture and language; developing visual analytical skills; and, discussing social/cultural issues. These will now be presented and discussed in turn.

### *Modelling Pedagogy for Future Teachers*

Picturebooks were central to these teacher educators as part of their teaching pedagogy. Seven of the eight participants interviewed mentioned they modeled the use of picturebooks to their students in tutorials. Several curriculum-area-specific examples from

the participants' reported practice follow:

Sam discussed several instances of how she modeled the use of picturebooks for literacy, indeed she reported that modeling picturebooks as pedagogical tools in the classroom is the main focus of her use of picturebooks in her teacher education. One task she gives students is using puzzles made from copies of book covers and asking students in groups to reassemble them and discuss what information can be gained from a book cover. She also described giving groups of students illustrations from a book and asking them to predict what was happening before and after that picture; or giving them a series of illustrations and asking them to create an oral storytelling.

In line with the learning area: English (MOE, 2007), Sam also reported using books to examine the language being used, and to promote the idea of writing: 'I also want to celebrate the rich array of New Zealand authors that we have, I mean Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley and Lynley Dodd ... they're some of the best in the world. And, not all our students know this. So I ... want to ... celebrate that New Zealand has produced a lot of authors, and the children in their class could be one of those authors one day, if they're really passionate about lit [sic], and foster an absolute love for books.'

Jane gave a detailed description of her use of picturebooks in drama education in which she deliberately models lesson plans for teaching drama:

'So drama takes a problem and makes it happen in 'the now time' ... for example, the lesson that I've used, I've come into role as Mrs. Grinling, from *The Lighthouse Keeper's* series. And I've kind of ... said 'you haven't seen my husband, have you? And my cat, Hamish? They rode off to the lighthouse and they haven't been seen for hours and the light hasn't come on.' ... so the students then kind of solve the problem and make suggestions to Mrs. Grinling... and the story is used to set up roles – time, space, action and focus. And then the drama conventions are used to explore that. Then, I ask the student teachers to use that exact same structure, and all the strategies, but with a different book. 'Cause the beautiful thing is, if you've got tension, and a person that you can be from the story, you can have the same lesson, but instead of coming in and saying 'you haven't seen my husband, have you?', you come in and say 'oh goodness me, that daft grandma has fallen into the lion pit!' And suddenly it's *Grandma McGarvey Goes to the Zoo...*'

Rosie is very explicit with her students about modeling ways of using picturebooks in science education: 'we talk about that right from the start, that I am modeling for them here, approaches, strategies, all sorts of things that I hope are going to provide them with models that they will take across to their classrooms.' Several examples of success with picturebooks she uses in her mathematics teacher education include *Who Sank the Boat* by Pamela Allen (floating and sinking), *The Magic School Bus* series (e.g. *The Electrical Field* or *Inside the Human Body*) and noted by Rosie as a particular favourite is *The Very Important Godwit* by Jenny Patrick. In the latter example, Rosie noted that she encourages the students to use the illustrations to see how the birds (godwits) are tracked with transmitters on their legs and this leads to further research by the students, including worldwide trends and habitats. Research beyond the picturebook is fostered in order to bring greater depth to that which is presented through words and images.

Rosie also gave an in depth example of using *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* by David Armitage (1977), showing us the versatility of this book which can be used for both drama and science.

'I put the book out, and I ask them to have a look at the book and get a sense of the story. ... And then I set a little scenario, and I say "well the lighthouse keeper is over in the lighthouse and his torch is broken, but he needs to signal his wife a message. And so he's got some old wires and he's found some old batteries and a piece of foil



and a couple of old yogurt containers... can you help his make a torch so he can signal his wife?" ... , these are kids [sic] that are coming in with no idea of electricity. Some of them will spend 30 minutes trying to make this. There are a number of other activities they can do, but they will choose to focus on this one activity. And you should hear the YAY when they get it to go! And then they all report back.... Their excitement! One said "I'm taking photos of this, I'm going to send this to my Dad, he won't believe that I made a torch!"

Anne mentioned *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (1969) which she uses for counting, time, and fractions in mathematics. She also discussed *Phoebe and the Hot Water Bottles* (Furchgott & Dawson, 1977), about a little girl who lives with her Dad and who gets hot water bottles every birthday. She explores with the student teachers how the book can be used for discussions of how many hot water bottles Phoebe has, and how many birthdays she has had.

Mary also explicitly discussed using picturebooks to model possibilities for mathematics teaching, with particular respect to the visual analysis of illustrations in relation to the text for *The Nickle Nackle Tree* by Lynley Dodd:

'We use it for numeral recognition, for counting, and thinking about differences'. So you're looking for a range of ideas, for young children, mostly. But there is quite a bit that can be drawn from this, and even this one page – one bird, but how many toes?'

#### *Making Links to Community, Language, and Culture*

As with the preservice Canadian teachers in Johnson and Bainbridge (2013), and the two New Zealand teachers in the work of Blakeney-Williams and Daly (2013), another aspect of the picturebook practice of the teacher educators was intentional attempts to build on what their student teachers knew and had experienced across the learning areas while also linking to home practices and the wider world. They could see the synergies between the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the pre-service teachers linked to the diversity in their future classrooms. Mary (mathematics) believed picturebooks connect communities and student environments: 'more and more books are coming out, or being published, ... in people's national languages, like in Samoan, Māori... and it's a nice way, if you have a Samoan student who's working with Samoan children, it's a nice way to connect with them as well...so that they don't feel as though they have to drop their culture, just because they're doing mathematics'. Ellen (mathematics) saw this use of picturebooks which linked to the students' background as being culturally responsive, as well as 'broadening views of the world while exposing students to mathematical concepts'.

In science, Rosie reported she tried to find picturebooks that crossed 'cultural borders' and to engage student teachers in science concepts and skills beyond a mono-cultural view. One example she gave was the New Zealand picturebook, *Koro's Medicine* by Melanie Drewery which tells the story of a koro ('grandpa') teaching his grandson about the use of traditional Māori medicine (*rongoā*). *The Kuia and the Spider*, by Patricia Grace, is also used by Rosie because it brings in concepts of different cultures (Māori/Pākehā) by telling the story of a kuia ('grandmother') and a spider who lives in her house, focusing on the different kinds of weaving they do, and the intense and complex relationship between them. Having discussed the cultural contexts, Rosie assists students to make connections between the weaving of the flax baskets and the intricacies of spider web making, the similarity of skills and the ways this supports their families. This involves research well beyond the book. Overall, Rosie's aim is to make all students, particularly Māori, feel comfortable by recognising their identity alongside that of others. She said, 'I value the

knowledge that comes through from this book and the questions that are generated in follow-up sessions.’ The importance of having picturebooks which reflect the identity of the children who read them has been discussed in terms of ensuring children both see themselves and others in the books they read (Daly, 2007).

### *Developing Visual Analysis*

Participants mentioned the extent to which the visual aspect of the picturebooks used was important. Mary mentioned that at times she and the mathematics pre-service teachers may analyse the illustrations first, and then read the book later: ‘there’s a beautiful book called *Emeka’s Gift* (Onyefulu, 1995), which links into Social Studies. But I link it to patterns and geometric patterns and relationships. It’s just beautiful but the wording in it is so dense that if you have to constantly listen rather than look, you lose the mathematics. So I find that reading it later is a really good way of giving justice to the literature’. Sam (literacy) said that she also refers to and unpacks the illustrations in books she reads with her students: ‘because they are learning to ...know, what colours project a particular mood, ..., the size of the person, whether it’s a zoom-in close-up picture ... of somebody ... in the picture... They’re learning about visual literacy and the sorts of things you need to talk to children about, to interpret visual images.’ For nonfiction picturebooks Sam might choose one or two pages to read, examine, and discuss with her students. She gave an example from *The New Zealand Hall of Fame: 50 Remarkable Kiwis* (Gill, 2012): ‘I’ve just pulled out the odd page from it, for the students to look at. And I talk about ‘how might you use this in your classroom to teach features of non-fiction texts such as layout and design?’ There’s a time line in it, there’s photograph film strips in it. A passport, you know, what information can we find on there.

Cherie in visual arts said that visual analysis of the illustrations was the primary focus of her use of picturebooks in her teacher education. She chooses picturebooks that relate to specific themes and language but also cultural symbols within the composition of the illustrations and design of the book. One story she discussed was *Āreta me Ngā Kahawai* (1994) by Patricia Grace. This book is about a little girl who becomes a kahawai (fish). Cherie reported that there is a great deal to teach her pre-service teachers using this picturebook in relation to movement and body, proportion and perspective, shade, and colour.

Ellen also used careful analysis of illustrations during a role play with her first year pre-service teachers with Pat Hutchins’ *The Doorbell Rang*: ‘when I’m modeling with my pretend 7 year olds, [doing role play] I draw on the visual clues, because there are pictures of biscuits that they have to count.’

Thus, as Pantaleo (2008) found with Canadian school children, and Hsaio (2010) found with kindergarten level Korean students, in the present study the practice of teacher educators evidenced a strong belief in the ability of picturebooks to be used to develop visual literacy skills among adult pre-service teachers.

### *Discussing Social/Cultural Issues*

While discussing her use of picturebooks, Sam (literacy) spoke about their use for discussing ‘difficult knowledge’ (Johnston & Shariff, 2013, p.52): ‘They’ve often got, ... a message or..., a conflict within them that can be discussed and it’s a nice safe forum to discuss issues.’ She also used them to raise discussion of ‘big picture’ kinds of issues relevant to teacher education, for example, she uses a specific picturebook called *The Woven Flax Kete* (Belcher, 2003) which tells the story of a little boy who goes tramping in the bush and

collects things in his *kete* ('woven flax bag'). She reads this book to her first year pre-service teachers and uses it as a springboard to discuss with them the skills and experiences they bring with them to their teacher education.

Demelza (inclusive education) told us about reading *Fox* (Wild et al, 2000) based on a Tolstoy story about the dilemma of whether to save an enemy from drowning or not. This led to discussion on the importance of effective teaching focusing on inquiry questions (McDaniel, 2004) She also explained the importance of picturebooks for showing readers they are not alone:

'Cause so often they'll, children and adults, will be ..., mesmerized or drawn to a certain story because it's shedding light on issues that they themselves have been grappling with, or that they themselves can relate to. And good teachers I think do this all the time, they ask... they'll stop and they'll, you know, in the middle of a picture book and say to the children 'have you ever felt like that? When has this happened for you?' ... And when children hear it, and adults, they learn they're not alone, they learn that here is a story put together by another human being who knows exactly what it feels like to walk this path'.

Jane (drama) said that 'more and more, I'm realising the value of content-based conversations as well as the pedagogical conversations. I mean, a beautiful lesson is when you feel you've kind of gone there in both ways'. Jane mentioned several picturebooks she uses which raise issues of particular relevance for future teachers, for example *Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story* (McGugan & Kimber, 1994) about an immigrant boy in a Canadian classroom at the turn of the 20th century, and the challenges he faces: 'And there is a reason why I keep returning to the Josepha drama, because it's about teaching, and it's about the relationship between a teacher and a student...and we end up reflecting after that picturebook sometimes for an hour or more on what it means to us.' Because of the 'difficult issues' which can be addressed within stories and books, Jane's drama education always includes discussions of safety, framing and distance, which she feels are parameters naturally provided for, to some extent, by picturebooks.

As has previously been shown with secondary students (Taliaferro, 2009), it seems that the teacher educators in this study also found picturebooks useful for broaching complex issues. The participants in this study linked the picturebooks they chose to use in their teacher education to their specific subject curriculum areas through choice of book, concepts and context-related experiences while also making links to wider social/cultural issues. The power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another world; to identify with and understand other's situations, feelings and motives; to attribute to an issue through one's own emotional or intellectual self were central to their aims and goals. Indeed it seems that picturebooks have the capacity to 'spark discussions which lead to increased awareness of the world' (O'Neil, 2010, p.40) and to develop critical thinking skills (Johnson & Bainbridge, 2013).

## Conclusion

Some of the findings of this study are not new: Firstly, picturebooks are being used across the curriculum (Blakeney-Williams & Daly, 2013); to encourage thinking and discussion of new and complex ideas (Johnson & Bainbridge, 2013; Taliaferro, 2009); for developing visual literacy (Pantaleo, 2008) and to reflect non-dominant cultural realities (Sneddon, 2009). Secondly, picturebooks are useful with older readers (Taliaferro, 2009) in tertiary teaching (Myerson, 2006) and with pre-service teachers (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013).

However, what *is* new is that the findings from this study document the ways in

which picturebooks are being extensively used across the curriculum in **teacher education** for multiple purposes; also, the extent to which teacher educators from a range of curriculum areas (not necessarily associated with children's literature) hold strong beliefs in and understandings of the power of picturebooks as pedagogical tools with pre-service teachers.

In sum, it seems that the power of picturebooks for the eight teacher educators in this study comes because these resources allowed the teacher educators to simultaneously teach content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Schulman, 1987). Another element contributing to the power of picturebooks was that they were useful in bridging negative attitudes to certain curriculum areas which all New Zealand primary teachers are required to teach (e.g., science, mathematics, drama) and for broaching complex and confronting social/cultural issues (Johnson & Bainbridge, 2013; Taliaferro, 2009). This study has shown that picturebooks may provide an avenue for gaining access to the perspective of a child learner; and in New Zealand schools and society picturebooks are highly accessible both in terms of physically availing oneself of a book and in terms of the presentation of unfamiliar concepts. Indeed the power of these often underestimated 'packages' of text and illustration is their multi-functionality.

This research did not explore the views of the pre-service teachers and how they perceived the use of picturebooks in lectures and tutorials. This is an area for future research. However, the teacher educators who participated in this research are experienced teachers who receive written feedback and appraisal on their courses from students each semester. It seems unlikely that they would continue to use picturebooks so extensively if they did not believe their students to be responding positively to and benefiting from their use. Future studies are also needed to determine if these themes are relevant for a larger number of participants, and also across international contexts.

## References

- Bader, B. (1976). *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to The Beast Within*. New York: Macmillan.
- Beckett, S. L. (2011). *Crossover literature*. In P. Nel and L. Paul (Eds). *Keywords for children's literature*. New York, NY: New York University Press
- Blakeney-Williams, M. & Daly, N. (2013). How do teachers use picturebooks to draw on the cultural and linguistic diversity in their classroom?. *Set*, 2, 44-50.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cho, B-K. & Jeong, J.K. (1998, April). *Literature-based Science Activities in Kindergarten through Children's Picture Books*. Paper presented to Association for Childhood Education International, Tampa, Florida.
- Daly, N. (2007). Kūkupa, Koro and kai: The use of Māori vocabulary items in New Zealand English picture books. *New Zealand English Journal*, 21, 20-33.
- Daly, N. (2008). The Narrative Contract and the use of Māori Loanwords in New Zealand English Picture Books. *Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, 5, 2, 1-17.
- Ell, F. (2011). Teacher education in New Zealand. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 37(4), 433-440.
- Fraser, D., Aitken, V., & Whyte, B. (2013). *Connecting curriculum, linking learning*. Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Gebhard, S. (2006). The lost boys (and girls) readers in Neverland. *Journal of Teacher Education*. 57 (5), 454-463. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487106294087>
- Gonzalez, N., & Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing*

- practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hsaio, C. (2010). Enhancing Children's Artistic and Creative Thinking and Drawing Performance through Appreciating Picture Books. *Jade*, 29(2).
- Jenkins, K. (2010). Positioning picture books within the mathematics curriculum. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 15 (2), 28-32.
- Johnston, I. & Bainbridge, J. (2013). *Reading Diversity Through Canadian Picture Books: Pre-service Teachers Explore Issues of Identity, Ideology and Pedagogy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Johnston, I. & Shariff, F. (2013). Who does this text think I am? Exploring questions of subjectivity through diverse picturebooks. In I. Johnston & J. Bainbridge (Eds.), (41-55). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McDaniel, .C. (2004). Critical Literacy: A questioning stance and the possibility for change. *The Reading Teacher*, 57 (5), 472-281.
- Meyerson, P. M. (2006). Using children's picturebooks as tools to facilitate undergraduates' learning. *College Teaching*, 54(3), 259-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CTCH.54.3.259-262>
- Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- O'Neil, K. (2010). Once upon today: Teaching for social justice with postmodern picturebooks. *Children's Literature in Education*, 41, 40-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10583-009-9097-9>
- Pantaleo, S. (2008). *Exploring student response to contemporary picturebooks*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Schulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching. Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Shatzer, J. (2008). Picture Book Power: Connecting Children's Literature and Mathematics. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(8), 649-653. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1598/RT.61.8.6>
- Sneddon, R. (2009). *Bilingual books. Biliterate children. Learning to read through dual language books*. London: Trentham Books.
- Taliaferro, C. (2009). Using Picture Books to Expand Adolescents' Imaginings of Themselves and Others. *English Journal*, 99.(2), 30-36.

### Picturebook references

- Allen, P. (1992). *Who sank the boat?* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin.
- Armitage, D. (1977). *The lighthouse keeper's lunch*. London: Deutsch.
- Beneduce, A. (1993). *Gulliver's adventures in Lilliput*. Sydney: Ashton Scholastic.
- Belcher, A. (2003). *The woven flax kete*. Auckland, NZ: Reed Publishing.
- Carle, E. (2004). *The very hungry caterpillar*. London:Puffin.
- Cole, J. (1989). *The Magic School Bus: Inside the human body*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cole, J. (1997). *The Magic School Bus: The electric field trip*. New York: Scholastic.
- Dodd, L. (1976). *The nickle nackle tree*. London: Hamilton.
- Drewery, M. (2007). *Koro's medicine*. Wellington: Huia Publishers.
- Furchgott, T. & Dawson, L. (1977). *Phoebe and the hot water bottles*. London: Deutsch.
- Gill, M. (2012). *The New Zealand hall of fame: 50 remarkable Kiwis*. Auckland, NZ: New Holland Publishers.
- Grace, P. (1983). *The kuia and the spider*. Harmondsworth: Puffin.
- Grace, P. (1994). *Āreta me ngā kahawai*. Auckland, NZ: Penguin.
- Hessell, J. (2005). *Grandma McGarvey goes to the zoo*. Auckland, NZ: Scholastic

- Hutchins, P. (1989). *The doorbell rang*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- McGugan, J. & Kimber, M. (1994). *Josepha: A prairie boy's story*. Chronicle Books.
- Onyefulu, I. (1995). *Emeka's gift : an African counting story*. London: F. Lincoln,
- Patrick, J. (2010). *The very important Godwit*. Auckland, NZ: Random House.
- Wild, M. & Brooks, R. (2000). *The Fox*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

**Acknowledgements:**

The authors would like to acknowledge the teacher educators who participated in this study, and funding from the Faculty of Education Research Committee. □