

An Examination of Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Using Social Issues Picture Books in their Future Elementary School Classrooms

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Introduction

Social issues picture books:

- Give voice to traditionally silenced groups of people,
- Explore/challenge dominant systems of meaning in our society (Lewison and Heffernan, 2008).

Many educators/experts defend the practice of introducing elementary school children to these books in order to **help children begin to think in ways that will allow them to contribute to the eradication of social inequities** (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008).

Research Question

How do preservice teachers feel about the inclusion of children's picture books with social justice themes in their elementary school classrooms and why?

Data Collection

Preservice teachers from Ivy Tech (n = 13), IUPUC (n = 19), and IUB (n = 5) read five social issues picture books online and responded to a Survey Monkey survey about them. **(TOTAL n = 37)**

Results

Prompt: "How likely would you be to read _____? Explain."

Key: Very Unlikely, Somewhat Unlikely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely

BOOK 1: *And Tango Makes Three* by Richardson & Parnell - Two same-sex penguins raise a baby penguin.

"You can't use a book like this because it promotes gays."	VU = 15%	SU = 18%	SL = 33%	VL = 33%	"...[Reading this book] would help decrease bullying towards LGBT students."
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BOOK 2: *A Shelter in Our Car* by Gunning - A homeless mom and daughter live in their car.

"This book is really depressing. ...It could scare kids."	VU = 0%	SU = 11%	SL = 26%	VL = 63%	"[Homelessness] ...needs to be addressed in schools. I like how this book presents it."
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BOOK 3: *My Name is Bilal* by Mobin & Uddin - A Muslim brother and sister are bullied for being different.

"If we can't push Christianity in schools why could we push the Muslim religion?"	VU = 11%	SU = 3%	SL = 37%	VL = 49%	"[Kids need to know that] It's important to treat everyone equal no matter their religion."
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BOOK 4: *I Love my Hair* by Tarplay - An African-American girl talks about why her hair is beautiful.

"I would probably just use a book with a white girl. ...My students wouldn't understand [this] book."	VU = 15%	SU = 18%	SL = 33%	VL = 33%	"Shows kids how different people are and they should love who they are."
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BOOK 5: *My Princess Boy* by Kilodavis & DeSimone - A mom talks about her young son who likes "girls things".

"There is no way I'd read this book! ...This isn't a problem [here.] It happens more in big cities."	VU = 18%	SU = 23%	SL = 27%	VL = 32%	"[This book] is so sweet. It depresses me that people are not tolerant of other people."
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Conclusions

80 % of responses were VL/SL vs. 20% VU/SU, suggesting that pre-service teachers are largely comfortable with social issues books. However, preservice teachers were least comfortable with the gender/sexual identity themed books. Perhaps this illustrates the ways in which, as a society, we have become much more tolerant of socio-economic differences (book #2), religious differences (book #3), and issues of race (book #4), but have a long way to go with regards to tolerating/embracing gender/sexual identity issues (books #1 and #5).