

Foreword

We are pleased to deliver the Special Conference Issue of *Papers*, a selection of articles arising from the thoughtful presentations and robust conversations at the 14th Biennial Conference of the Australasian Children’s Literature Association for Research.

Originally scheduled for 2020, the conference, like so many facets of our lives, was thwarted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Two years passed until we were able once again to bring together scholars of children’s literature to engage with our conference theme: *Owning our Voices: Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Agency in Children’s and Young Adult Literature*. For the first time, the conference went ahead in hybrid form, delivered both online and in-person. Many travelled to a gloriously sunny Perth, Western Australia, to participate in person, while others joined us online or from our satellite Melbourne hub. Over a hundred people participated from Canada, Japan, Egypt, China, the UK, South Africa, the USA, Poland, Malaysia, and, of course, across Australia and New Zealand.

In 2015, Corinne Duyvis created the hashtag #ownvoices to designate literature featuring diverse characters written by authors who share the same diverse identities. Initially intended to highlight writers working on the periphery, the #ownvoices movement has resulted in widespread debate on notions of marginalisation, authenticity, appropriation, and political correctness. Within the world of children’s and young adult literature, this debate is particularly nuanced when considering that the voice of the child is typically at odds with its adult

authorship. The 2022 Biennial ACLAR conference explored some of the tensions within these key debates.

It gives us great pleasure to present these four articles, each offering thoughtful and nuanced response to Duyvis’ provocation. Our first article comes from the team who presented one of our keynote addresses. Dr Melanie Braith, Grace Braniff, Amanda Laverdure, and Benjamin Roloff from the ‘Six Seasons of the Asiniskaw Īthiniwak Project’ at the University of Winnipeg, interrogate the keywords from the conference theme: legitimacy, authenticity, and agency. Arguing in favour of cultural competence and accuracy over authenticity, the writers discuss the cross-cultural research and practice which has shaped the project, one which shares knowledge about Rocky Cree culture in northern Manitoba, Canada, through historical picture books, picture book apps, and teachers’ guides that seek to engage young readers within First Nations culture and community.

Our second article by Dr Alex Henderson explores the potential of narrative point of view in validating genderqueer identities. Henderson identifies the possibilities and limitations inherent in first-person, close third-person, and omniscient third-person narration in terms of representing non-binary voices and identities, offering a call to action to scholars for further narratological research.

The third article by Jennifer Briguglio considers the tensions between young adult agency and the didactic imperative inherent in much young adult literature. In her examination of teen witches in Rachel Griffin’s *The Power of Witches* and Kalynn Bayron’s *This Poison Heart*, Briguglio applies an ecofeminist lens to consider whether the protagonists’ supernatural abilities provide opportunity for power and agency within the social realm.

Taking a different direction, Amie Johnstone considers the representation of sheep in a range of picturebooks. Johnstone mounts a challenge to the typical representation of sheep as

voiceless, the other to the human protagonist, pointing to narrative strategies that may instead grant sheep sentience and agency. By comparing a range of picturebooks by Australian authors and illustrators, Johnstone draws attention to the prevalence of a cultural ideology which objectifies and diminishes farmed livestock, and sheep in particular. Pointing to examples which resist this norm, Johnstone calls for a re-evaluation of the human-animal relationship and a recognition of the sentience of sheep.

We hope you enjoy the discussions offered here and are drawn to musings of your own regarding the questions of authenticity, legitimacy, and agency that proliferate within literature for young people.

Dr Adam Kealley and Dr Debra Dudek

Convenors of the 2022 Biennial Conference of the Australasian Children’s Literature Association for Research

Biographical Note

Debra Dudek is an Associate Professor in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University. She has published extensively on visual and verbal texts for young people, including television, film, graphic novels, and picture books. Much of her research focuses on how texts for young people communicate ethics and social justice issues. She is the author of *The Beloved Does Not Bite: Moral Vampires and the Humans Who Love Them* (Routledge, 2017) and a co-editor of *Contemporary Love Studies in the Arts and Humanities: What's Love Got to do With It?* (Palgrave, 2023).

Adam Kealley is Head of Academics and Innovation at Wesley College. He has published on queer and Australian Gothic novels for young people, as well as for the education market. His PhD project employed spectrality as a metaphor for queer coming of age.