Amplifying Indigenous Voices: Four Indigenous Publishing Houses

Maria Scaletti, Julie Barbour, Nicola Daly and Nicholas Vanderschantz

Abstract

Existing research in the field of Indigenous children's literature is sparse but growing. A notable gap in the literature is the paucity of insight into Indigenous picturebook publishing. In preparation for a larger study of Indigenous Publishing processes, in this study, we conducted a website analysis to explore the work of Indigenous publishing houses. From this data, we constructed four case studies focusing on Magabala Books (Australia), Black Bears & Blueberries Publishing (USA), Theytus Books (Canada), and Inhabit Media (Canada). Additionally, we present a close analysis of four recently published picturebooks from the publishing houses (one from each). In this paper, we provide insights into the key themes underpinning the four Indigenous publishers, including a commitment to storytelling, collaboration and education; the amplification and prioritisation of Indigenous languages; the place external funding; incorporation of Indigenous art; and the educational background of the authors and illustrators.

Introduction

Picturebooks are a powerful form of children's literature (Kummerling-Meibauer et al.), providing opportunities to introduce culture, heritage, and history to children, families, and communities, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse traditions and narratives. We posit that picturebooks play a crucial role in preserving Indigenous languages and storytelling traditions, offering a platform for voices that have been historically marginalized and thus, investigations of Indigenous picturebook publishing are required (Hadaway and Young "Celebrating", "Preserving"). While research in the field of Indigenous picturebook publishing has been limited, it is steadily increasing, with scholars exploring the representation of Indigenous cultures, examining themes of nationalism, suppression, and cultural resistance (Bradford). Others have investigated the impact of Indigenous storytelling traditions on literacy development and cultural identity formation among Indigenous youth (Pietikäinen & Pitkänen-Huhta; Hanson et al.).

In the prelude to their analysis of ten Indigenous Canadian picturebooks, Stagg-Peterson and Robinson (1) note the predominance of Indigenous stories told by non-Indigenous authors and illustrators. They emphasise the contribution that Indigenous written and published stories can make to the revitalisation and transmission of culture and language between generations. Symbolically, Indigenous picturebooks communicate the importance of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being in the world. They observe that Indigenous authors and illustrators create books for Indigenous readers who "bring Indigenous perspectives and experiences within a colonialist society to their reading" (Stagg-Peterson & Robinson 3), and that the books themselves introduce different narrative structures and perspectives on connections between the spiritual and natural worlds. In the sparse literature concerning Indigenous children's literature in settler nations such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand (see Braith et al.; Gilderdale) it is noted that there has been a plethora of Indigenous stories retold by non-Indigenous authors, but in recent times Indigenous publishing houses which nurture Indigenous writers and illustrators have been growing in number.

We are four researchers with a strong interest in Indigenous representation in picturebooks in Aotearoa. Three of us are Pākehā[i] academics based at a New Zealand university, working with a

first-year Māori university student, who was participating in our research project as a Summer Scholar[ii]. This article is based on findings from that project. In this preliminary and exploratory research, based solely on information available through websites and in published picturebooks, we present four case studies of Indigenous publishing houses outside of Aotearoa. We undertook this project to inform our future research examining Indigenous publishing in Aotearoa with focus on answering what are the key themes underpinning the work of four Indigenous publishers?

Literature Review

There are many decision makers and gatekeepers in the publication of children's literature, and the publisher is one of these (Encisco et al.). While some research has examined the diversity of representations in children's literature (see Daly et al.; Caple and Tian), there is a paucity of scholarship examining how publishers contribute to diversity, particularly in relation to Indigenous languages and cultures. It is indeed difficult to locate any research specifically focusing on how Indigenous publishers of children's literature feature Indigenous voices, cultures, and identities.

Through their community research, Braith et al. present the experiences of the Six Seasons of the Asiniskaw Īthiniwak project, sharing "knowledge about Rocky Cree culture in northern Manitoba, Canada, through historical picture books, picture book apps, and teachers' guides" (1). Exploring concepts of legitimacy, authenticity and agency, Braith et al. conclude that their work is about communicating with children learning about Asiniskaw Īthiniwak history for the future. This provides much needed reflection on how Indigenous children's literature can be created legitimately and authentically, which is of particular importance in the Canadian context due to calls for action resulting from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015.[iii]

In contrast to the paucity of work about publishing Indigenous children's literature specifically, some studies (see Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE); Wissman "Reading radiantly") discuss the importance of children's literature in shaping children's identities and views of the world. The limited reflection of some children in reading material has implications for reading engagement and the perpetuation of social inequality (see Adam; Koss; Tschida et

al.). The inclusion of work by Indigenous authors, illustrators and publishers has the potential to create rich picturebook content, reflecting authentically Indigenous languages, cultures and identities.

Materials for language education and literacy are considered essential for maintaining and improving language vitality (UNESCO). However, there is only limited research into the role of picturebooks in language revitalisation (see Brouwer & Daly; Fuimaono et al.). Nicola Daly's study ("Linguistic landscapes") has also shown that picturebooks written in te reo Māori (the Indigenous language of Aotearoa) and dual language Māori-English texts provide readers with access to language and cultural content. Meanwhile, Nic Vanderschantz and Nicola Daly's ("The implication") research into the interaction between Indigenous and colonial languages in content created by Indigenous publishers has the potential to reveal a different narrative of linguistic representation.

Robyn Sheehan-Bright's survey of Indigenous publishing in Australia highlights the dominance of non-Aboriginal authors and publishers until the 1960s, when Indigenous publishers began to emerge. Juliet O'Conor compares the 1896 retelling of Indigenous stories in *Australian Legendary Tales,* by settler Katherine Langloh Parker with Elder Wilf Reeve's 1964 collection, *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*. O'Conor finds that the Indigenous legends are "distinguished from early setter interpretations by the relatedness of each story to the specifics of culture and country" (25). Publication of Aboriginal materials continues to face challenges, with Sheehan-Bright ("Red, yellow and black") noting efforts to rewrite traditional narratives to fit standard English language patterns and narrative structures, in a context where few Indigenous people are being trained into editing and reviewing roles.

In the Canadian context, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission requires teachers to include Indigenous knowledge and histories in the learning experiences of children, Aubrey Jean Hanson et al. identified the value of Indigenous children's literature for preservice teachers. Hanson's team found that "stories open up spaces to learn from the voices of Indigenous authors and storytellers" (82), with valuable opportunities to learn about Indigenous languages and cultures, relationships, ways of being, and "nurturing the spirit through story" (82-84).

Nancy Cooper ("The importance") identifies the key role of grandparents in Indigenous Canadian picturebooks, as sources of knowledge and as cultural leaders. Lisa Korteweg and colleagues focus on the potential of Indigenous Canadian picturebooks to decolonize the environmental consciousness of readers, concluding that "all non-Indigenous people sorely need Indigenous ways of knowing the land in order to imagine, empower and enact other ways of being on the Earth" (347).

In summary, the research we have surveyed shows that Indigenous picturebooks are valuable sources of identity representation and of learning in several different educational contexts. We now turn our attention to Indigenous publishing houses, specifically investigating how their work contributes to representations of Indigenous languages and cultures.

Method

In order to investigate our research question, we undertook a web search that identified approximately 20 Indigenous publishing houses worldwide. We supplemented this web search with lists of known publishers provided by the research team, and their personal networks. Using this sample of potential case study subjects, we reviewed each publisher to assess the following criteria:

- a publicly available website;
- books by this publisher being listed on the website;
- information provided about the origins of the publishing house;
- information provided about funding where possible;
- information provided about authors and illustrators either on the website and/or in the books from the publishing house.

We excluded publishers from Aotearoa, New Zealand, as three of us were about to embark on a 3-year research project looking at an Indigenous publisher in Aotearoa, and the motivation for the present research was to explore international practice in this area.

From our initial audit, four publishers were chosen: Magabala Books in Australia, Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing in the USA), and two publishers in Canada, Theytus Books and Inhabit Media. We note that there are many other Indigenous publishers worthy of extended

research. This study provides an initial foray into exploring representations of Indigenous knowledge and cultures by these four Indigenous publishers.

Using the publicly available website, and a selection of picturebooks from each publisher, we adopted a mixed methods approach combining visual and content analysis to investigate (1) the origins of the publishing house; (2) the motivation for publishing; (3) the Indigeneity of the picturebook creators in each publishing house; (4) the place of Indigenous knowledge in picturebooks published; (5) funding sources; (6) genres of books published; and (7) the place of translation in publications.

Information about all areas was not always available on the selected websites, but an overall picture of each publishing house was sketched. In addition, there was a particular focus on the languages used to tell stories and their placement on the page, using analytical methods previously developed to explore translingual picturebooks (Barbour et al.); and a linguistic landscape approach (Vanderschantz and Daly, "Typographic") which examines the order, relative size, and typography of the languages presented in bilingual picturebooks.

Findings

In this section we outline our findings for the four publishing houses. For each publishing house we present some history of their establishment, an overview of their authors, illustrators and catalogue, and where possible, funding sources. Additionally, we present a close analysis of a recent representative picturebook from each publishing house. The books reflect different assumptions that creators are making about their readers' engagement with the Indigenous language and culture of interest. We progress from books which require no prior knowledge of language and culture, to books designed for more knowledgeable readers.

Magabala Books[iv]

Magabala Books is a distinguished Indigenous publishing house in Australia, which traces its roots to a cultural festival in 1984. This gathering of over 500 Aboriginal Elders and leaders—aimed to fortify cultural resilience and safeguard cultural and intellectual property—led to the establishment of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) and the establishment of Magabala Books in the same year.

Founded with the vision to inspire and empower Indigenous voices, Magabala publishes in English, weaving in the Indigenous languages of the authors. They also publish some bilingual books. Their commitment to Indigenous publishing is reflected in a robust submission policy. While acknowledging collaborations with non-Indigenous authors, they require a minimum 50% contribution from Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators, ensuring meaningful inclusion and respect for Indigenous perspectives. The translation aspect, represented in bilingual and translingual texts, remains integral to their commitment to diverse storytelling.

Over 110 picturebooks are listed on Magabala's website at the time of writing, celebrating diverse Indigenous voices. A sample of Magabala's picturebooks indicates that their creators locate their stories through the use of Indigenous toponyms, landscapes, and character names, along with translanguaging in their English-medium stories. The publishing house supports creators through various schemes, including Australian Indigenous Coffee (AIC) creative grants, scholarships, the Daisy Utemorrah Award for fiction writers, and the Kestin Indigenous Illustrator Award for emerging artists. Magabala is supported at a national level through the Australia Council, and regionally through Western Australia's Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

Cooee Mittigar - a story on Darug songlines, written by Jasmine Seymour and illustrated by Leanne Mulgo Watson (see Figure 1), is a translingual picturebook from Magabala Books. Seymour and Watson are both educators and members of the Darug[v] Custodian Aboriginal Corporation. Watson says, "I had always wanted to create books to share our knowledge, as education is the key to our culture staying strong".

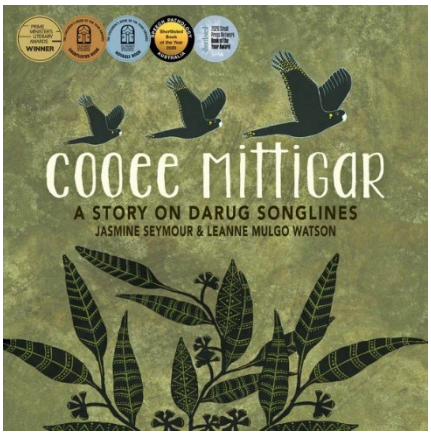

Figure 1. Cover of *Cooee Mittigar - a story on Darug songlines* by Jasmine Seymour and Leanne Mulgo Watson

In this translingual picturebook, we are greeted by Mulgo, the black swan, and welcomed to *nura (walk)* through the land. Journeying through the seasons, Mulgo describes Darug Country, the skyscape, birds, animals, and totems, many of which are referred to with Darug language, and represented in Watson's Indigenous artwork.

The text of *Cooee Mittigar* alternates between Darug and English, with one early spread reading:

> Our song begins when the darrabura grows long and the weather warms up.
> Look for wumbat babies and warada in the time of the flannel flowers, wubin and bottlebrush dumarang.

Cooee Mittigar includes a page-by-page glossary listing Darug words and their meanings in the order they appear. The glossary is positioned either below the running text or on the facing page, with a smaller font size, signalling its support function. Illustrations helpfully depict the concepts that are expressed in Darug language:

(2)	darrabura – day	(daytime scene illustrated)
	wumbat – wombat	(illustrated)
	warada– waratah	(illustrated)
	wubin – feather-tailed glider	(illustrated)
	dumarang – flowering plants	(illustrated)

The page-by-page glossary, together with informative illustrations, provides immediate accessibility and integration of the Darug language into the reading experience. *Cooee Mittigar* appears to be designed for readers with no prior knowledge of Darug. At the end of the book, a complete alphabetised glossary is included as an educational resource, featuring 74 Darug words from the running text, and a pronunciation guide.

Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing[vi]

The youngest and smallest of the publishing houses is Black Bears and Blueberries, a publishing house dedicated to Indigenous literature, supporting authors from Washington state, Maine,

Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Co-owners Thomas D. Peacock and Elizabeth Albert-Peacock, both Lake Superior Ojibwe, state their intent "to work with Native authors and illustrators in developing and publishing books using their voice and their art to promote cultural literacy for everyone." They primarily publish picturebooks and actively seek support for their creators through initiatives like the Indigenous Writers Gathering, AICHO (American Indian Community Housing Organization) Indigenous Writers Series, and the Indigenous Art Fair. We were able to identify 16 in-house picturebook publications on their website, the earliest being *The dancers* in 2019, written by co-owner Thomas D. Peacock and illustrated by Jacquiline Paske Gill.

Black Bear and Blueberries' publications are predominantly by Ojibwe authors, featuring some content in the endangered Ojibwe language (Williams 838). There is little information available online regarding their funding, the role of translation and the integration of Indigenous languages and knowledge in the publishing process, although the publisher describes itself as "a Native owned non-profit publishing company" (Albert-Peacock).

The four hills of life for children is a recent picturebook published by Black Bears and Blueberries (see Figure 2). Author Elizabeth Albert-Peacock is an enrolled member of Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwa, while illustrator Anna Granholm is an aspiring teacher. In this story, lives are represented by four hills (seasons) which all come with their own challenges and responsibilities. Childhood is represented through Spring, youth by Summer, adulthood through Autumn, and elderhood by Winter.

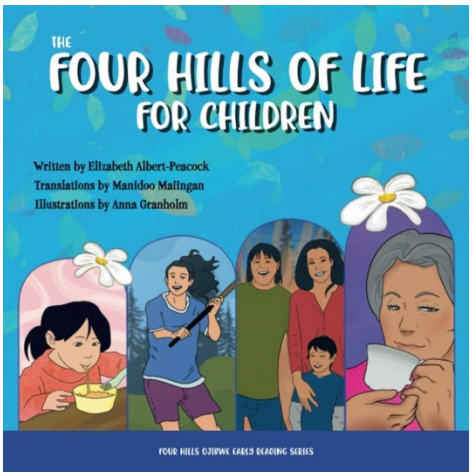

Figure 2. Cover of *The four hills of life for children* by Elizabeth Albert-Peacock

This bilingual picturebook strategically emphases the Ojibwe (Algonquian) language, which is presented first on each page, in a large bold font. The English text appears at the bottom of each page in a smaller font. This deliberate formatting choice communicates the prioritization of the Indigenous language within the book. The Ojibwe text of *The four hills* comprises either a single word or a short sentence per spread. Some word parts are identified with a dash, and this appears to correspond to the distinction between grammatical elements in places. The text of three consecutive two-page spreads is shown in (3).

(3)	Makwag Bears
	Waabigwaniim Flowers
	Gigii-ondaadizimin We were born

The reader can access a substantial amount of Ojibwe vocabulary as well as simple sentence structures in this bilingual picturebook. As such, *The four hills* provides an entry point for the reader to engage with Ojibwe language and cultural understandings.

Theytus Books[vii]

Situated on the Penticton Indian Reserve in British Columbia (Canada), Theytus Books is a First Nations-owned and operated publishing house founded in 1980. The name "Theytus," meaning "preserving for the sake of handing down" in Salish (a Pacific Northwest Indigenous language), reflects the publisher's mission to capture and preserve Indigenous cultures. Theytus Books emphasises authentic representation of Indigenous narratives in their publications, exclusively accepting manuscripts from Canadian Indigenous writers. Theytus acknowledges support from public funding provided by the Canada Council for the Arts.

Like Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing, Theytus Books is a small-scale publisher with just over 30 children's picturebooks listed on their website. Their earliest listed picturebook was published in 1986. Many of their books are bilingual, featuring Indigenous languages belonging to the Northern Athabaskan, Algonquian, and Iroquoian language families, or Mètis.

A recent picturebook from this publishing house is *Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch*, written and illustrated by Jennifer Leason, written and translated by Norman Chartrand (see Figure 7). Both Leason and Chartrand are Saulteaux-Métis Anishinaabek and members of the Pine Creek Indian Band, Manitoba. Leason is an assistant professor in Indigenous Peoples Health at the University of Calgary.

Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch features English and Anishinaabemowin (the Ojibwe language of the Algonquian family[viii]) in a bilingual format; additionally, both texts feature words and phrases from the other language in a translingual format.

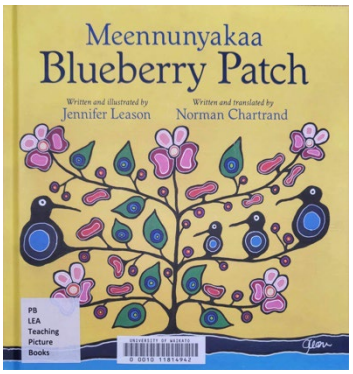

Figure 3. Cover of *Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch* by Jennifer Leason

In *Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch*, the narrator tells the story of the annual month-long blueberry harvesting expedition that he used to go on with his family. The story opens by locating the reader in time and place: “My story begins at blueberry-picking time, in the late 1940s, at Duck Bay near Camperville, Manitoba”. It ends with the narrator’s return home: “At the end of the month we packed up our wagon, joined the wagon train, and made our way back home to Camperville”.

The English text is presented first on each page, positioning English readers as the primary audience for the book. Anishinaabemowin follows in a slightly smaller but bold font; the words are broken into smaller elements using dashes. The Anishinaabemowin version of the story appears to be written for readers who already know the language, supporting reader-fluency, rather than serving as a language-learning resource for beginners.

There is limited translanguaging[ix] in each version of the text: two Anishinaabemowin words for story elements appear in the English text. Both are immediately translated for the reader.

(4)	a.	The wagon train came to a place called my-tic-ano-chi-go-ki-ishi-git, which means "tree that grows weird." (accompanying illustration of tree)
	b.	We came to Pelican River, where someone had made a ka-nap-ac-kos-ekat-dec, which is a bridge made of wooden planks.

In the Anishinaabemowin text English proper nouns are woven in, as well as the phrase "blueberry patch" and "wood flooring bridge", the latter of which is presented in both languages.

(5) a. *Place Names*
Camperville Manitoba
Cowan
Camperville

b. *Personal Names*
Dick (personal name) (accompanying illustration of mule)
Marcel et Hubert (note the use of the French coordinator *et* 'and'; accompanying illustration shows the narrator and his brothers)

c. *Story Elements*
blueberry patch (accompanying illustration)
ka-nap-ac-kos-ekat-dec wood flooring bridge (both languages are given)

Thematically, the family activity of blueberry-harvesting represents a traditional intergenerational practice, undertaken by people who knew their traditional lands through old trails and natural landmarks, rather than roads and maps. It also represents the broader bonds between members of the Indigenous community, who travel and live together for the harvest month.

Inhabit Media[x]

Inhabit Media was established in 2006. It was Canada's first Inuit-owned publishing house, aiming to "promote and preserve the stories, knowledge, and talent of the Arctic, while also supporting research in Inuit mythology and the traditional Inuit knowledge of Nunavummiut (residents of Nunavut, Canada's northernmost territory)" (Inhabit Media). Motivated by the need for accurate representation of Nunavut culture in school materials, Inhabit Media collaborates

with elders and storytellers to preserve Inuit oral history. Like Theytus Books, Inhabit Media is supported by public funding from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Inhabit Media publishes books for all ages, and at the time of writing there are over 115 children's picturebooks listed on their website. Most are published in hardcover in English and in paperback in Inuktitut (Eskaleut)[xi], using Inuktitut syllabics. The syllabic writing system was adapted from a syllabary used to write Cree by an Anglican Missionary Edmund Peck in the 1970s (Indigenous People's Atlas Canada). A smaller number of picturebooks are published in French versions, and in other Indigenous languages or language varieties of the Nunavut region. Some books are available as English e-publications, and as audiobooks in English and Inuktitut.

A recent bilingual picturebook published in 2023 by Inhabit is *Mahahaa*, written by Jeela Palluq-Cloutier and Neil Christopher, illustrated by Babah Kalluk (see Figure 2). *Mahahaa* is a dark folktale that was traditionally told to children, and Kalluk's illustrations convey the frightening experiences of the protagonist Aulaja.

Figure 4. Cover of *Mahahaa* by Jeela Palluq-Cloutier and Neil Christopher

Like *Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch*, *Mahahaa* opens by locating the reader in place and time: "This story begins in the High Arctic of Canada, in the early Spring". It tells the story of a young girl Aulaja, who is alone in her camp with only her dog Siku for protection. She faces a terrifying encounter with a Mahahaa demon. *Mahahaa* is a bilingual picturebook featuring Inuktituk in the Cree-based syllabic orthograph, followed by English. The font maintains uniformity in colour

and size throughout. While initially authored in English and then translated into Inuktitut, positioning Inuktitut first emphasises the significance of the Indigenous language for this story. Of the four books examined in this article, *Mahahaa* is the longest and most complex. A reader would need to be literate in Inuktitut to engage with the Inuktitut text; there is no evidence of English orthography in the Inuktitut version.

The English text does include some Inuktituk words, although it maintains an English orthography throughout. Indigenous character names are included: Aulaja (the protagonist), Siku (her guard dog), Kudloo (Aulaja's father) and the Mahahaa demon. The Mahahaa is depicted on the front cover of the picturebook, and described in detail within the text.

The three Inuk words that are not proper nouns in the English text are italicized and represented in illustrations.

(6)	a.	And with that, he left Aulaja alone in the *iglu.* (illustration on previous page of Aulaja's home)
	b.	Then Kudloo and Aulaja packed their belongings into the *qamutiik* and with their dogs, they left that place. (sled is depicted in earlier illustrations)
	c.	But before they left they built an *inuksuk* with many thin rocks to represent Mahahaa's long fingers. (accompanying illustration of rock cairn)

A glossary at the end of the book lists the Indigenous words that are used in the English story, including character names. The English text and glossary assume no familiarity with Inuktitut language and culture, supporting comprehension and guiding the pronunciation of the small number of Inuk words that are included. Future exploration of how Inhabit Media decide which orthography to use in their stories is an area which would be interesting to explore.

Discussion

As we analysed information gleaned from the four Indigenous publishers' websites, several themes became apparent: a commitment to storytelling, collaboration and education; the amplification and prioritisation of Indigenous voices; the use of external funding; the educational background of the authors and illustrators; and the incorporation of Indigenous languages. These will now be discussed in turn.

Commitment to Storytelling, Collaboration, and Education

As shown in previous work on individual Indigenous picturebooks (Stagg-Peterson and Robinson; Hanson et al.), the four Indigenous publishing houses demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the art of storytelling, recognising it as a powerful tool for cultural preservation and sharing knowledge. Emphasising collaboration, these entities often engage with Indigenous communities, authors, and illustrators to ensure authentic representation and storytelling. Additionally, education stands as a core value for the publishing houses, with the goal of fostering understanding and appreciation of Indigenous cultures through literature.

Amplification and Prioritisation of Indigenous Voices

A shared objective among the four Indigenous publishing houses is the amplification of Indigenous voices, similar to the aims of the Asiniskaw Īthiniwak project (Braith et al.). By providing a platform for Indigenous creators, the four publishers actively contribute to the diversification of the literary landscape, giving space and power to Indigenous languages, and disrupting existing language hierarchies (Daly, "The linguistic landscape"). Through a variety of genres and formats, they aim to showcase the richness and diversity of Indigenous perspectives, fostering a broader understanding among readers.

The inclusion of Indigenous languages in the text of the picturebooks featured above shows one of the powerful ways in which Indigenous voices are prioritised through Indigenous languages and orthographies. By featuring literature created by Indigenous authors and illustrators, these works play a crucial role in affirming the cultural identity of Indigenous communities. This prioritisation appears to extend beyond the content itself, influencing editorial decisions, artistic choices, and the overall narrative direction of the publications.

External Funding

A characteristic of the Indigenous publishing houses in this research is their use of external funding to support their publications. In her overview of Māori language publishing in New Zealand, Jennifer Garlick also notes that in the 1980s, most Māori material was funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, with publishers being reluctant to fund Māori publishing for the perceived smaller number of adult readers (at the time). Recognising the financial challenges

often faced by smaller and independent publishers, the four Indigenous publishing houses in this study actively seek grants, sponsorships, and partnerships to ensure the continued production of Indigenous literature. This use of external support, particularly government funding, underscores the ongoing need for broader recognition and sustained investment in Indigenous storytelling.

Educational Background of Authors and Illustrators

A notable trend within Indigenous publishing is the prevalence of authors and illustrators with a background in education, bringing a wealth of knowledge and cultural understanding to their work, and reflecting a commitment to educational outreach. It was clear from the materials analysed that many of content creators leverage their pedagogic expertise to craft narratives that serve as educational tools. While there is much research about the ways in which educators use children's literature to support cross-curricular and cross-level teaching (see Korteweget al.; Daly and Barbour), research concerning educators as authors and illustrators is more difficult to find. In her exploration of the motivation behind the creation of bilingual picturebooks, Nicola Daly ("Exploring") found that some authors were deliberately including the Indigenous Māori language in English texts for educational purposes; however, there is a dearth of research examining educators as authors.

Incorporation of Indigenous languages

The four Indigenous publishing houses explored in this article all display a commitment to Indigenous languages by including them alongside English in the four books analysed. In some cases, the Indigenous language is privileged, and English is subordinated; in others the Indigenous language is subordinate to English. Inhabit Media commonly publishes separate versions of their books, for different audiences. There is a growing body of work exploring the significance of typographic layout in bilingual picturebooks. The order, size and weight of typography for different languages may be reflective of different intended audiences, and appears to lead readers to interpret the relative importance of each language (see Vanderschantz et al. "Typographic design" "The effect of typographic text").

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has explored the available data on websites and in a representative published work for four Indigenous publishers from Australia, the USA, and Canada. We uncovered several key themes underpinning the practices of these Indigenous publishers, including a commitment to storytelling, collaboration and education; the amplification and prioritisation of Indigenous voices; use of external funding; the educational background of the authors and illustrators, and the incorporation of Indigenous languages. We intend to explore more closely the visual design of these publishers in a future related article. These initial findings are an important step in increasing our knowledge of Indigenous picturebook publishing.

Our findings provide an invitation for future studies of a wider range of Indigenous publishers, including those outside of English-speaking contexts, and in which publishers, authors, and illustrators are interviewed in depth. Indeed, a project in collaboration with an Indigenous publishing house (Huia Publishers) in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is currently underway.

Works Cited

Children's Books

Albert-Peacock, Elizabeth. *The Four Hills of Life for Children*. Illustrated by Anna Granholm. Translated by Manidoo Maiingan, Black Bears and Blueberries, 2023.

Leason, Jennifer & Norman Chartrand. *Meennuyakaa Blueberry Patch*. Illustrated by Jennifer Leason. Translated by Norman Chartrand, Theytus Books, 2019.

Palluq-Cloutier , Jeela & Christopher, Neil. *Mahahaa*. Illustrated by Babah Kalluk, Inhabit Media, 2023.

Seymour, Jasmine. *Cooee Mittigar - a story on Darug songlines*. Illustrated by Leanne Mulgo Watson, Magabala Books, 2019.

Secondary Sources

Adam, Helen. "When authenticity goes missing: How monocultural children's literature is silencing the voices and contributing to invisibility of children from minority backgrounds." *Education Sciences* 11.1 (2021): 32.

Barbour, Julie, Daly, Nicola, & Wessels, Kanauhea. "Te Reo Māori and New Zealand English: a critical perspective on the loanword narrative using data from translingual picturebooks." *International Journal of Bilingualism.* Forthcoming.

Black Bears and Blueberries Publishing, 2024, http://www.blackbearsandblueberries.com/

Bradford, Clare. *Unsettling narratives: Postcolonial readings of children's literature*. Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2007.

Braith, Melanie, et al. "Rethinking Authenticity, Legitimacy, and Agency in the Context of the Six Seasons of the Asiniskaw Ithiniwak Project." *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 28.1 (2024): 1-25.

Brouwer, Jacqui, and Nicola Daly. "Reo rua pukapuka pikitia: Whanau drawing on their community cultural wealth to create strategies for developing te reo rangatira." *Early Education* 68 (2023): 4-11.

Caple, Helen, and Ping Tian. "I see you. Do you see me? Investigating the representation of diversity in prize winning Australian early childhood picture books." *The Australian Educational Researcher* 49.1 (2022): 175-191.

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). *Reflecting realities: Survey of ethnic representation within UK children's literature 2017–2021,* 2022 https://clpe.org.uk/system/files/2022-11/CLPE%20Reflecting%20Reality%202022%20WEB_0.pdf

Cooper, Nancy. "The Importance of Grandparents in Indigenous Children's Literature." *Canadian Children's Book News* 44.2 (2021): 18-21.

Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC). *Books by and/or about Black, Indigenous and People of Color 2018*, 2022 https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-and-or-about-poc-2018/

Daly, Nicola. "Linguistic landscapes in Māori-English parallel dual language picturebooks: Domination and interaction." *New Zealand English Journal* 30 (2016): 11-24.

Daly, Nicola. "The linguistic landscape of multilingual picturebooks." *Linguistic Landscape* 5.3 (2019): 281-301.

Daly, Nicola. "Exploring author motivation, intended audience, and text layout in dual-language picturebooks." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 58.1 (2020): 45-59**.** DOI: 10.1353/bkb.2020.0003

Daly, Nicola, and Julie Barbour. "Using dual language picturebooks to teach language contact phenomena in a tertiary context." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 26.7 (2023): 876-890.

Daly, Nicola, et al. "Diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand picturebooks published between 2021 and 2022." *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 48.1 (2025): 57-75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-025-00076-y

Enciso, Patricia, et al. "Children's literature: Standing in the shadow of adults." *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45. 2*(2010): 252-263.* https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.45.2.5

Fuimaono, Angela, Nicola Daly, and Janette Kelly-Ware. "Talanoa, va and picturebook pedagogy to support Pacific identities in a kindergarten setting." *Early Education* 68 (2023): 12-19.

Garlick, Jennifer. *Māori language publishing: Some issues.* Huia Pub., 1998.

Gilderdale, B. (1982). *A sea change: 145 years of New Zealand junior fiction*. Longman Paul.

Hadaway, Nancy L., and Terrell A. Young. "Celebrating and revitalizing language: indigenous bilingual children's books." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 51.3 (2013): 56-68. https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2013.0062

Hadaway, Nancy L., and Terrell A. Young. "Preserving languages in the new millennium: Indigenous bilingual children's books." *Childhood Education* 90.5 (2014): 358-364. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2014.952569

Hanson, Aubrey Jean, et al. "Gathering Stories, Gathering Pedagogies." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 32.3/4 (2020): 63-87.

Indigenous People's Atlas Canada. *Inuktut Writing Systems.*n.d. https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/language

Inhabit Media. *About,* 2024. https://inhabitmedia.com/about/

Kelly-Ware, Janette, et al. "Language learning using Pacific picturebooks in an Aotearoa New Zealand kindergarten." *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 49.3 (2024): 264-277.

Korteweg, Lisa, Ismel Gonzalez, and Jojo Guillet. "The stories are the people and the land: Three educators respond to environmental teachings in Indigenous children's literature." *Experiencing Environment and Place through Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2014. 75-94.

Koss, Melanie D. "Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis." *Journal of Children's Literature* 41.1 (2015): 32-42.

Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina, et al. *Learning from picturebooks*. Taylor & Francis, 2015.

Livesay, Nora. *About the Ojibwe Language*. The Ojibwe People's Dictionary, 2021 https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/about-ojibwe-language

Macquarie Dictionary. The Sydney Language (Darug and Eora), 2024 https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/the-sydney-language-dharug-eora

Magabala Books. *About Magabala,* 2024 https://magabala.com.au/pages/about-us

O'Conor, Juliet. "Indigenous Voices in Australian Children's Literature: Indigenous Australian Story." *Marvels & Tales* 36.1 (2022): 11-27.

Pietikäinen, Sari, and Anne Pitkänen-Huhta. "Multimodal literacy practices in the indigenous Sámi classroom: Children navigating in a complex multilingual setting." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 12.4 (2013): 230-247.

Sheahan-Bright, Robyn. "Red, Yellow, and Black: Australian Indigenous publishing for young people." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 49.3 (2011): 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2011.0045

Stagg Peterson, Shelley, and Red Bear Robinson. "Rights of Indigenous children: Reading children's literature through an Indigenous knowledges lens." *Education sciences* 10.10 (2020): 281. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10100281

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Manitoba, Canada. 2025 https://web.archive.org/web/20200506065356/http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Tschida, Christina M., Caitlin L. Ryan, and Anne Swenson Ticknor. "Building on windows and mirrors: Encouraging the disruption of "single stories" through children's literature." *Journal of Children's Literature* 40.1 (2014): 28-39.

UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. *Language vitality and endangerment,* 2003. https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf

Theytus. *About Theytus,* 2025. https://www.theytus.com/About-Theytus

Vanderschantz, Nicholas, and Nicola Daly. "The implications of typographic design in bilingual picturebooks for hierarchies." *Journal of Visual Literacy* 42.1 (2023): 48-66.

Vanderschantz, Nicholas, Nicola Daly, and Vouchleang San. "Typographic design in Māori-English bilingual picturebooks: Some educational implications." *Children's Literature in English Language Education* 10.1 (2022):14-40.

Vanderschantz, Nicholas, Nicola Daly, and Vouchleang San. "The effect of typographic text presentation on reader perceptions of importance in bilingual Māori-English picturebooks." *Visual Communication.* Forthcoming.

Williams, Victoria R. *Indigenous Peoples: An Encyclopedia of Culture, History, and Threats to Survival [4 volumes]*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2020.

Wissman, Kelly K. "Reading radiantly: Embracing the power of picturebooks to cultivate the social imagination." *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 57.1 (2019): 14-25. https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2019.0002

.

---

[i] A New Zealander of European descent

[ii] A ten week paid research project offered to select students by the University of Waikato during the summer (November-February).

[iii] Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008 by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2007) with the express purpose of informing all Canadians of the Residential School System and its continuing effects. For over 150 years the Canadian government and a range of churches ran Residential Schools which removed over 150,000 Indigenous children from their families in order to assimilate them, a process which subjected children to physical, emotional and even sexual abuse. In 2015 the TRC published their findings including 94 calls to action, to address the ongoing trauma within Indigenous communities.

[iv] https://magabala.com/

[v] Darug (also spelled Dharug) is an Australian aboriginal language spoken in the greater Sydney area (Macquarie dictionary, 2024).

[vi] http://www.blackbearsandblueberries.com/

[vii] https://www.theytus.com

[viii] Anishinaabemowin is a Central Algonquian language spoken by the Anishinaabe people throughout much of Canada from Ontario to Manitoba and US border states from Michigan to Montana. Revitalisation efforts are underway, with immersion schools operating in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Ojibwe has a growing number of second-language speakers, and the language is taught in many secondary and post-secondary classrooms throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario (Livesay, 2021).

[ix] Translanguaging is when speakers/texts move fluidly from one language to another. It is a feature of bi/multilingual speech and writing.

[x] Inuktitut language and dialects are spoken by a range of people in the Arctic Circle in countries which are now known as Russia, the US state of Alaska, and Canada. There are reported to be 12 main dialects of Inuktitut, 9 different writing systems and 3 ways of writing. There is a desire to standardise the orthography, and the publication of children's picturebooks using this orthography will contribute to this.