

The Education University of Hong Kong

*An honours project paper entitled*

Understanding diversity from children's literature:  
A case study in Hong Kong primary education

*submitted to the Education University of Hong Kong for the degree of Bachelor of Education  
(Honours) English language (Primary)*

*by* CHANG, Lai Ying Michelle

Supervisor: Dr. CHANG, Benjamin

11th May, 2018.

## Content

<b>Research Background and Significance</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Research Questions and Key Concepts</b>	<b>4</b>
Research Questions	
Key Concepts	
<i>Diversity</i>	
<i>Critical literacy</i>	
<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Research Design</b>	<b>8</b>
Research Method	
Sampling Method	
Validated Instruments	
Data Analysis Method	
Ethical Considerations	
<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>11</b>
Background of Organisation	
Researcher Personality	
Background of Participant	
Teaching/Learning Process	
<b>Findings</b>	<b>14</b>
Observation	
Interview	
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>18</b>
Theme of diversity arriving with notions of social justice	
Confronting inaccurate and imbalanced portrayals of the character's community	
Extending the notions in the picture books with personal experiences	
<b>Implications and Future Directions</b>	<b>23</b>
Representation in children's literature and student's response	
Critical literacy education with bilingual students	
Theme of diversity and other related notions arising through reading	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>29</b>
Interview Questions & Code Chart	

## **Research Background and Significance**

Throughout the teacher education I have been receiving over the last five years, I have been taking courses about children's literature and its relevant pedagogical practices. From my position as a research assistant, I constantly reflect upon how I can facilitate the learning of diversity for my students through a critical lens. Critical literacy from educator and philosopher Freire has inspired and allowed me to unfold the potential of children's literature, through understanding how reading bridges oneself to the world, in order to implement diversity education (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Children's literature has been serving pedagogical practices from the beginning of its history (Nikolajeva, 2015), and has been recognised as a powerful resource in language learning (Ma, 2014; Mourão, 2014) that features affective, creative, and inspirational qualities (Shanahan, 1997). However, it still lacks adequate recognition in English as a second language context, as the use of literature is limited to textual experience only (Mourão, 2014).

It is important for teachers to recognise the possibilities of children's literature in primary education beyond learning only words. As we use language to express ourselves and understand the world, there is a need for realising the connection between a child's worldview and children's literature he/she reads (Nikolajeva, 2015). Reading through the literary lens enables possibilities for reading about social reality and learning about power relations, as teachers' awareness of culturally responsive education alone is still not enough to support the use of children's literature for confronting prejudices and constructing worldview (Bhowmik, Kennedy, & Hue, 2017).

Hong Kong students have developed different sociocultural identities and built up their prejudices to block themselves or the others from integration in this increasingly diverse society (Ladegaard, 2016). The judgments of *otherness* are not based on evidence, but cultural values and prejudices, which call for a reform for culturally responsive education when nurturing students to respond to diversity (Bhowmik, Kennedy, & Hue, 2017). Therefore, the rationale of this study is to allow students respond to diversity using critical literacy and how they make sense of the children's literature.

## **Research Questions and Key Concepts**

### **Research Questions**

The study aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. How might primary students in Hong Kong understand diversity from representations of characters of diverse backgrounds in children's literature through critical literacy?
2. To what extent may primary students in Hong Kong relate their experiences to children's literature to respond to diversity?

### **Key Concepts**

#### *Diversity*

Diversity, like what its name suggests, is a concept without fixed meanings. This study adopts the definition of identification of individuals with racial, ethnic, gender, linguistic, socioeconomic, religious and other factors (Banks, 2006).

#### *Critical literacy*

Critical literacy examines dimensions of linguistic, social, and cultural meanings of texts for relating individuals to the world, particularly for power relations (Mayo, 2004); it also operationalises critical consciousness in refusing the acceptance of knowledges that are generated by the dominant (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

## **Literature Review**

Ghosn (2002) suggested justifications of teaching children's literature for children's development, including transforming attitudes, eliminating prejudice, and fostering awareness of other issues, in addition to children's literature's traditional role in language education. Although children's literature provides and advocates worlds of children in representing the world in the spirit of humanity, children's attitudes can be affected by the types of literature that children access to and relate to (Nikolajeva, 2015).

One major problem behind includes under-representations in children's literature, which has been a recognised problem for readers, where the portrayals of characters, settings, problems, and resolutions do not truly reflect authentic cultural or social values (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Marshall, 2004; Rogers & Christian, 2007). The gap between reality and literature may seem trivial at a glance, but such gap can already form, and reinforce bias towards their views of themselves and the others as under-representations might also be viewed as artefacts of communities involved (Rogers & Christian, 2007).

The representations of children's literature have transformed to represent more themes in relations to societies, e.g. death (Nikolajeva, 2015), multiracial identity (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013), and gender issues (Marshall, 2004), but they are not adequate for children to understand and confront power relations directly from these representations (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Literary analyses have shown that while some children's literature works are labelled as multicultural or multiracial, some of them contain contents of race as problems of the protagonists, or race to be irrelevant to the story, which ignore the cultural heritage of the portrayed communities (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Similar content that gives bias of the portrayed communities appears in other types of children's literature, including gender (Marshall, 2004), queer (Smolkin & Young, 2011), and disability (Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, & Shah, 2010).

The problems arising from under-representations have directed this study to incorporate critical literacy, as Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) marked the importance of engaging in a constant dialogue that examines existing knowledge and realises the traditional prejudices that contributed to marginalising specific communities and individuals through this framework. Critical literacy education concerns with teaching and learning to understand, handle, and confront the relationship or injustice between language and power (Janks, 2000), which allows students in this study to examine the representations in children's literature and then to respond to diversity critically through this framework.

While children's literature, which provides a lens for students to understand and access to the literary world, is suitable and appropriate to empower students to address diversity (Nikolajeva, 2015), there are problems in representation and portrayal in literature. Having recognised these limitations, children's literature has its value and uniqueness in the teaching and learning process to explore power relations in and around literature. It helps teachers to shape insights about diversity, and analyse power, privilege, and justice in class (Bell & Roberts, 2010).

The children's literature used in the study are based on historical figures, and it deals with class, gender, race, activism, rights, and justice. The children's literature chosen in this study intended to be based on categorisation and findings of literary studies on diverse representations (Marshall, 2004; Beckett, Ellison, Barrett, & Shah, 2010; Smolkin & Young, 2011; Chaudhri & Teale, 2013), but the school in the study requested the relevant children's literature to be related to historical characters or famous figures. After negotiation, I decided to use picture books of historical characters who can represent authentic view of diversity. The choice of historical fiction serves to confront under-representations as the books act as artefacts of communities involved in the stories for comprehensive and authentic experiences (Rogers & Christian, 2007).

The authentic and lived experience can possibly complete the understanding of diversity and relation to students as the communities are similar to their cultural heritage, as students do not learn from isolation but dialogue (Freire, 1970), which can be facilitated through the literary lens (Nikolajeva, 2015).

This study, therefore, engaged in promoting diversity in primary education with critical literacy through children's literature, which has not been well-researched in Hong Kong classroom context. However, a relatively similar study conducted in a kindergarten in South Korea about multiculturalism through children's literature, with a major limitations in the lack of examination of the impacts of multicultural literature on the children's attitudes towards the other racial and ethnic groups after the teaching (Kim, Wee, & Lee, 2016).

As children's literature has different types of literary lenses, in order to investigate the perceptions and attitudes towards diversity, this study covered a selection of children's literature to learn diversity from different representations and questions about characters' community. Freire had raised the importance of drawing students' knowledge and their sociocultural backgrounds in implementing critical literacy (Mayo, 2004). Therefore, this study covered investigate how students understand diversity from the representations with critical literacy in research question one.

Furthermore, in order to help students to understand diversity, and the truth and cultural ideals in the children's literature (Morrell, 2015), the children literature in this study should make sense with students' everyday and academic worlds (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Therefore, this study also covers investigating how students relate their experiences to the children's literature in research question two.

## **Research Design**

### **Research Method**

The study was a case study that collected qualitative data to examine how the teaching of children's literature influence students' response to diversity and interpretation of representations in children's literature.

The entire study aimed to conduct a case study of three to five students initially, and the teaching consisted of two different works of children's literature; in other words, under action research framework, the teaching consists of two different cycles in spiral of cycles of sets of decisions in planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Somekh, 2006). Through the learning and teaching of critical literacy, the study also provided a mutual learning process supported both by the researcher and the participants (Boog, 2003). The learning in the study was also a process of investigation of inquiry that allowed the learning of knowledge and skills through analysis and making sense of the texts (Stringer, Christensen, & Baldwin, 2010).

The study, however, collected data from one student, see *Background of Participant*, but the research method, including the mutual learning, teaching approach, and investigation method, remained unchanged.



## **Sampling Method**

The study was conducted in a local primary school in Hong Kong where the researcher had her teaching practicum to fulfil graduation requirements and hence relevant teacher qualification requirements. Due to limitations of number of students, school policies, and administrative practices in the school, control group for measuring the changes of results was not possible. However, the data collection consists of two separate interviews by the end of the guided reading of relevant children's literature and students' work to ensure the validity of the study.

The study used purposive sampling. However, before purposive sampling, the possible population for the stage of sampling was reduced to the number of students I could reach. The participant was chosen by criteria of English language proficiency, views of diversity, and sociocultural identities. Purposive sampling allowed this study and the teaching to be related to the students, through eliminating or lessening the effects of language barriers. It also ensured that the study seeks alternative views and comprehensive evaluations to inform culturally appropriate and equitable views regarding diversity (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012).

## **Validated Instruments**

The instruments of the study include observations and interviews.

The researcher used field notes to record the participant's response during the guided reading process. The observation included participant's responses during the guided reading process. The observations emphasised students' verbal response and researcher's general impression. The observations are also accompanied by observer's comments after the teaching, and before coding to emerge patterns in the observational data (Mertler, 2012).

Interviews were to assess the participant's views on diversity. Interviews were semi-structured to open possibilities and to provide options to respond to participants' answers (Mertler, 2012). The interview questions were designed with neutral terms to avoid potential risks as the study includes issues related notions of discrimination, race, gender, political movements.

## **Data Analysis Method**

All of the qualitative data in this study were analysed by axial coding (Kolb, 2012), and was to provide sources for an inductive analysis to answer the research questions for the researcher to note patterns and outliers, to inform practice, and to develop discussion and conclusion from analysis (Mertler, 2012). The researcher had experiences with coding qualitative data, and was aware of the importance of not oversimplifying, generalising, or misinterpreting data collected (Schwalbach, 2003). The codes from different sets of data were not exhaustive, where the researcher coded the data according to her observation of the data, and did not adjust to match other codes to ensure they remain accurate, credible, and dependable (Mertler, 2012).

## **Ethical Considerations**

This research involved a teacher-student relationship and the participant, parents of the participant, and the school were informed that the identity of the researcher should not be a factor for participating in this study. All the personal or school information is not identifiable through any publication or sharing about this study. The participant, parent, and school were given an information sheet with information of the purposes, procedures, potential risks, withdrawal possibilities, and relevant contacts for information or complaints before giving consent. All the students involved in this study are identified with pseudonyms for confidentiality.

## **Data Collection**

### **Background of Organisation**

The data collection site is a aided primary school located in an area of generally lower socioeconomic status. Most of the students are considered disadvantaged because of lower socioeconomic status, and/or mild special educational needs. Ethnic minority students usually take up approximately 8% of the student population. The minority students are Chinese as a second language learners. The school runs its curriculum in Cantonese except for English language subject.

### **Researcher Personality**

As a practising teacher, I had tried to be a supportive figure to my students. As I witnessed the lack of expectation for students, I tried to develop a habit of goal setting and reviewing performance with students to develop their reflexivity and agency in their lives. I also tried to engage in a casual manner with students outside of class to talk about our everyday lives for mutual learning.

## **Background of Participant**

Although the study aimed at conducting three case studies with three students to investigate the relationship between the school, the books, and the students' worldview, such arrangement was not possible due to an unexpectedly long period of review within the school. The study was conducted with one participant.

The participant, Chesa (all students' names are pseudonyms), is a 12-year-old, primary 6 and Christian student who was born and raised in Hong Kong. She is one of the third generation of her immigrant family from the Philippines. She is also a member of the school's affiliated church. Her religious practices within the school did not lead to issues that other Sikh, Muslim, or Buddhist students experienced.

She has good command of the languages taught in the school, including English, Cantonese, and Mandarin Chinese, as code-mixing and code-switching are natural and fluent. Chesa felt frustrated as she had studied Chinese (Cantonese and limited Mandarin Chinese as requirement in the school) in mainstream schools, as the first of the family to attend mainstream schools. Her brothers studied in the Philippines and England for secondary and tertiary education, and she preferred to study in the Philippines because of issues with medium of instruction, language assessments within Hong Kong's education system (Chang, 2018).

I first had personal connection with Chesa in an after-school tutorial session for non-Chinese speaking students as a substitute teacher. We had a conversation about learning Chinese, her family and secondary education briefly in the tutorial. After the conversation, I had researched on secondary education options for minority students to follow up the. Later, I taught her in Saturday classes and interview training, facilitated her drama group rehearsals, and led her to a competition outside of the school.

Chesa would opt to interact with me during recesses and lunch hours even when she had the choice of being with her peers. We constantly discussed about different topics related to her studies and personal lives.

## Teaching/Learning Process

Before the study began, I introduced Chesa to different topics, i.e. disability, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language, and showed a few books to choose from if she was interested. I mentioned if none of the topics were appealing, she did not have to make a choice, as the study aims to relate to students' experience (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Soon after I showed her the topics and books, she chose *I am Rosa Parks* (Meltzer & Eliopoulos, 2014) and *Emmeline Pankhurst* (Kaiser & Sanfelippo, 2017).

The two books are historical picture books from different publishers, writers, and illustrators to diversify perspectives. *I am Rosa Parks* is based on American civil rights movement activist Rosa Louise McCauley Parks. *Emmeline Pankhurst* is about British suffragette movement leader Emmeline Pankhurst. The two books represent distributive justice and equal rights.

Including the books to the choices was not arbitrary. While picture books about historical characters are not uncommon, female and minority are less common in children's literature with a long history of under-representations (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Marshall, 2004; Rogers & Christian, 2007). As I observed inequity in a few practices in the school, I decided to choose to incorporate the discussion of equity along with diversity to relate to Chesa better. The themes of the two books revolve around feminism/ethnic minority, resistance, and resilience.

Guided reading process was adopted with consideration of our roles for mutual learning and co-investigation (Freire, 1970). During the guided reading process of *I am Rosa Parks*, I supplied information when she needed help. After reading together, we had an interview about diversity and fairness. She requested to borrow the book to share with several friends, Bagwis, Jane, and Chloe in her class.

During the guided reading process of *Emmeline Pankhurst*, Chesa understood almost all the content in the book. As the image of the suffragettes was under-represented, I supplied additional information to guide Chesa to question about the portrayal. After the guided reading, she requested to borrow the book again. We then had an interview about diversity and fairness. She shared with me later that she had used the book for a project and shared in front of the class in English lesson.

## **Findings**

### **Observation**

During the guided reading session, I collected data from observation using field notes. During the reading of *I am Rosa Parks*, Chesa chose to read aloud with me as the book has some speech bubbles expressing solidarity and conflicts. As we read to pages about comparison between elevators, water fountains, and schools for the whites and the *coloured*, she made a comment and ignited a short conversation about unfairness and her imagination of creating wastes when building facilities twice as they were “stupid to spend money to separate people”.

During the reading of *Emmeline Pankhurst*, Chesa chose to read aloud with me sometimes along the narratives. When we read to a page about Emmeline Pankhurst’s partner, Richard Pankhurst, who worked with Emmeline Pankhurst for women’s rights to vote, Chesa commented that “people fight for themselves. He’s really nice to fight for the others.” She also mentioned that when everyone could vote, the votes would become “less important”. Richard Pankhurst’s action was seen significant to her as he already had the power to vote and make informed choices.

In both of the books, she experienced a few difficulties where she asked questions about specific terminologies, including segregation, seamstress, and suffragettes. While there were adequate contextual clues for guessing, I supplied some simpler definitions to enrich her understanding.

Chesa was curious about the movements and the characters. She asked questions about the characters’ death, e.g. “is she still alive?”, in both of the stories. After reading some pages of sad periods for the communities, the movements, and/or the characters, Chesa uttered “aw” and sometimes said “it’s sad” and “that’s bad” multiple times.

## Interview

The interviews were conducted in English and Cantonese. The dialogue involved code-mixing and code-switching to facilitate discussion of more complex ideas and reflection. Audio recordings were not allowed by the school from negotiation, so interview notes were taken according to what Chesa said. All the interview notes, however, were all taken in English to follow the interview pace. The findings shared here are mostly indirect speech as direct transcription was not possible in the interviews. The notes were coded later, see *Appendix* for full interview questions with major codes.

After reading *I am Rosa Parks*, we had an interview that lasted for 12 minutes. Regarding similarities and differences between her and Parks, Chesa said that they were “created equally” and both of them are “human beings” and “the same”. When asked about her opinions on Parks’ community, she said she understood how it felt like to be judged and it was “not easy to stand up”. She admired the people protested. She also flipped to the page of Montgomery Bus Boycott crowd and pointed to the protesters and showed me what she talked about. She also mentioned that Mrs Parks was “brave to face unfairness”. Major codes include equality, humanity, drawing personal experience, resistance, bravery, and social change.

Regarding respecting differences in the school, she said that as long as everyone thought about the others and argued for the right things, it would be “ok to argue”. She said comments “should not be personal [translated]”. When asked about personal experience of not being respected, she told me about her size being criticised when she was in primary 4 and her experience of being scolded of having an ethnic Chinese boy with Bagwis in a drama, which was marked “lame” as both Bagwis and Chesa were not Chinese. I then shifted to how she felt in the incidences and why the experiences were significant. She said it felt awful to be laughed just because of things she couldn’t change. Major codes include right and wrong, drawing personal experience, inherent qualities, and accepting differences.

As themes and problems we encountered in the book and in the school evolved around fairness, when asked to define “fairness”, she defined fairness as everyone “respect(ing) each other” and “treat(ing) everyone fairly”, but not treating people differently because of their skin colours or origins. She also added a remark of how we should “treat others like we treat ourselves”. Major codes include respect, treatment, equality, avoiding judgements, and empathy.

After reading *Emmeline Pankhurst*, we had a similar interview that lasted 15 minutes. When asked about similarities and differences between her and Pankhurst, Chesa said that Pankhurst was very different from her as Pankhurst “changed the society, raised awareness, and fought for her beliefs [translated]”. She said that their similarities would be that they both are women and hoped to “change the society”. When asked about opinions towards the community that Pankhurst led, she said they were “all brave and strong”, although they looked “intimidating” as they set fire to get what they wanted. Major codes include social change, determination, personal beliefs, and sense of community.

As the book mentioned the part of destructions during the revolution very lightly, the illustration only showed them protesting outside of the Buckingham Palace. I presented to Chesa that the suffragettes used more tactics including deploying bombs and destroying museum and gallery exhibits. I asked Chesa if she would change the book. She said she would “include more information to give everyone clearer perspectives [translated]”. When asked about what kind of information the writer was trying to pass, she paused and said before I supplied the information, the image of Emmeline Pankhurst was “different”. She said that “it was also brave to set bombs and destroy exhibits to fight for the voting rights [translated]” because they waited for so long and Emmeline Pankhurst lost her partner, but there might have been better means to accomplish the goal. She added that the writer tried to hide it so younger children might think that Pankhurst was more positive.

When asked about respecting differences, she said that we should “all be like Richard Pankhurst”, Emmeline Pankhurst’s partner, as “he supported the rights of the women and he could already vote without getting into the troubles of the movement [translated]”. She said that boys and girls in the school should respect each other so everyone could “play and learn together and feel safe [translated]”. Major codes include supporting the others, and respecting differences.



When asked about how fairness meant to her again, Chesa said that fairness would be “giving the same to everyone so everyone can enjoy”. I then asked if we were given the same resources and I needed more resources to function and she did not need as much to get to the same place, whether or not we should be supplied the same in the first place. Chesa said that she would give her resources to me and people should re-distribute when they have excess. By the end of the interview, I asked Chesa about how she looked at diversity. Chesa said diversity was important because we have different difficulties and we should “respect each other and treat people fairly”. Major codes include rights, distributive justice, identity, and resource re-distribution.

## Discussion

### **Theme of diversity arriving with notions of social justice**

From interview after reading *I am Rosa Parks*, Chesa's idea of fairness included the notions of race and cultural heritage. Although it was not clear if the idea was directly from the representations or her experience, the concept is closely related to the both. While the suggestion of similar treatments for others and oneself was not entirely clear, a possible interpretation behind includes empathy, care and respect. The theme of justice arrives with diversity as she experienced injustice within the school and the book. Her interpretation has been shifted to justice and related notions from diversity and communities as she recognised a gap between her schooling experience and the end of the civil rights movement.

From the interview after reading *Emmeline Pankhurst* along with the idea of inclusiveness, her concept of justice responded to how people of diverse backgrounds should not be discriminated because of their backgrounds and people should respect others' rights. Her recognition of the need of further re-distribution was interesting as she moved from equality to equity towards the end. Her idea was rounded up with how people have different difficulties and how they should be treated. Her idea of equity was not as structured as her idea of equality, but it showed that her interpretation of fairness was different from the materials I supplied on whether equality or equity would be appropriate when we discuss diversity as she independently developed her means to address injustice and diversity without using the voice of the authors nor the teacher (Freire, 1970).

As the two picture books both share representations of oppressed communities to illustrate injustice and the movements to equal rights. Chesa recognised the power relations and conflicts of interest of the marginalised or oppressed communities with the mainstream through the representation of the female and the *coloured*. She also saw the white protesters in the Montgomery Bus Boycott movement and the figure and death of Richard Pankhurst as significant figures as they were already having the power that Parks and Pankhurst aimed to gain; therefore, her idea of diversity included supporting the others and respecting differences.

In response to research question one, Chesa's interpretation of characters with diverse backgrounds was extensive as she understood political rationale and social movements while learning about diversity through the representations. Her concepts of diversity evolved around respect, equality, and resistance emerged from the minority, and how those with power attempted to fight with the oppressed communities for equality (Freire, 1970).

## **Confronting inaccurate and imbalanced portrayals of the character's community**

From the interview after reading *Emmeline Pankhurst*, Chesa deconstructed the agenda of supplying the positive image of supplying positive portrayal of the suffragettes movement. She demonstrated substantial understanding to why the portrayal was represented in such way and derived that writing with more information would be clearer. Chesa responded her views on the imbalanced image of the community and questioned whether it was appropriate for younger readers as the gap between the under-representation and facts reinforces bias through reading (Rogers & Christian, 2007).

Although the tactics were seen as violent and intimidating, Chesa acknowledged that the suffragette community had unique reasons to engage in such actions to achieve justice. Chesa mentioned that the group experienced prolonged period of injustice, and also addressed that they could have been other actions to reduce violence. Chesa demonstrated understanding of power in the under-representation as she shared about how the portrayal was problematic in different levels, including why the author chose the materials, how the portrayal would be seen, and why the actions were taken by the suffragettes. Her choice to include more perspectives in the book for “clearer” information suggests that she has the awareness to use language to confront the biased representation.

In response to research question one, Chesa demonstrated beginning critical literacy skills in recognising the author's choice of materials and representation for the characters to achieve a more positive image of the suffragettes through guiding questions. However, Chesa did not completely reject the text, although she challenged that more information should be presented in the books (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

## **Extending the notions in the picture books with personal experiences**

From the observation during reading of *I am Rosa Parks*, Chesa's learning from the books are justified with her interaction, concentration, curiosity, and empathy through her voluntary reading aloud in the reading process, together with the book report for school assignment, and sharing with classmates. She has showed me that she valued the opportunities of reading the two books and the activism behind was significant. Her questions and empathy about the death and experience of Mrs Parks and Mrs Pankhurst allowed me to visualise the care and connection to the movements and their lives with Chesa's experience. She cared about the movements and the protagonists and developed empathy and respect towards them and their actions as we co-investigated the issue diversity through the literary lens with the texts (Nikolajeva, 2015).

From the interviews, the codes of social change, determination, beliefs, and sense of community arose as she identified herself as "the same" as Parks as they were "created equally" and thought that Pankhurst was brave and different from herself; however, she added they were both female. From her response, Chesa identified herself to Parks more. As Chesa also addressed that she understood that the communities were desperate for justice and rights and thus started the movement, the identity of Chesa was closely related to how she responded to the characters in the books as she understood the power relations and issues of injustice and emerged an understanding towards communities and diversity from her identification with the characters.

Chesa also mentioned about understanding how it was like being judged, and how equality should be implemented regardless of individuals' colours or origins, she showed her understanding of communities and diversity and reflection upon her past experiences. With her reflection on how brave Mrs Parks and Mrs Pankhurst were to break the unfair laws, Chesa demonstrated her learning from the stories and her feelings towards the two. Chesa's reflection about the experience of Parks to her own experience and citation of incidents of being judged was extended to how it is inappropriate to be judged by inherent qualities, e.g. race.

Despite of being a student who excelled in aforementioned interpersonal relationships, English language curriculum, and drama performance, Chesa still struggled in her schooling experience. Her hope for fostering an inclusive community at school and recognition of the importance to embrace inherent qualities together responded to the two books' issues of discrimination and notions of diversity.

Although she did not mention any experience of being discriminated on the school policy level, which would have been comparable to Mrs Parks' situation and possibly to other minority students' in Chesa's school, she mentioned being marked as different by her classmates. She showed her ability to relate herself to the picture books to extend notions in the books with thematic codes of accepting differences. She related the learning of the picture books to her everyday life to articulate notions she interpreted to bridge the text to her life (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

In response to research question two, Chesa extended notions of discrimination and power relations to her personal experiences as she related her everyday life to the text and articulated her worldview of how inclusive environments operate.

## **Implications and Future Directions**

### **Representation in children's literature and student's response**

As the some children's books include biased or problematic portrayals in school libraries (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Marshall, 2004; Rogers & Christian, 2007), a teaching implication includes the inclusion, selection, and discussion of books about authentically represented identities, human conditions, and societies within the literature (Nikolajeva, 2015; Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Marshall, 2004) to confront power relations directly (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). From this study, Chesa responded to the representations in the two picture books with insights about diversity, power, and justice (Bell & Roberts, 2010) in this study, which might not have been possible if the children's literature does not serve the purpose of artefacts of communities involved (Rogers & Christian, 2007).

### **Critical literacy education with bilingual students**

This study involved a lot of vocabulary and syntax in Cantonese to assist Chesa's expressions, as the purpose is not to enrich Chesa's textual experience in English during the guided reading (Ma, 2014; Mourão, 2014). Many concepts and practices were communicated in Cantonese, which is the dominant language and the medium of instruction of the school curriculum. If the dialogue was monolingual, the variety of expressions might have been limited; Chesa relied on both languages to communicate broader ideas. Furthermore, Hong Kong students' linguistic repertoire in Cantonese and English point to a direction of using Chinese and English versions to examine the portrayals and representations.

As the most important aspect within this study is to engage students to understanding, handling, and confronting the injustice between language and power (Janks, 2000), reading from multiple angles could facilitate their learning of how the portrayals change. As Chinese and English are pragmatically different in writing styles, social interactions, and linguistic choices, having two versions of different languages might contribute new findings in differentiating portrayals and representation, and further develop critical literacy with their linguistic ability with the advantage of bilingualism in Hong Kong.

## **Theme of diversity and other related notions arising through reading**

The interview results also pointed to the directions of the theme of justice, which arrived with a cluster of closely related notions, e.g. equality, re-distribution, power, resistance, rights, and activism, during the data collection process. While justice is related to diversity, the two picture books about equal rights shifted Chesa's focus. Although the discussion of justice was only remotely relevant to diversity, Chesa's idea of justice demonstrates an ideal of equality among communities and inclusive society for the mainstream and the minorities.

A possible reason is that the questions were more indirect and loose, as asking questions about race and gender directly might lead to labelling and stereotyping. Therefore, the questions were more indirect, e.g. community, belonging, and similarities and differences with the characters, to reduce observer's paradox and potential criticism.

However, the discussion of the issues ignited future directions of including these closely related notions to the interpretation of diversity in the research focus to gain more comprehensive results for discussion. As readers tend to have different distance with and interpretation of literature, Chesa's focus showed that limiting responses to certain ideology is not possible or realistic. Chesa's attitudes and awareness towards diversity and related issues in the books were shown through her extensive response, which can be crucial to her development of eliminating prejudice through the literary lens of humanity (Ghosn, 2002; Nikolajeva, 2015).



## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, referring to the research questions, Chesa's response to characters of diverse backgrounds in children's literature was extensive with her understanding of the representations in the literature about the characters of diverse background on cultural, social, and political levels. She also demonstrated ability in confronting inaccurate and imbalanced portrayal of certain character's behaviour in an interview with her emerging critical literacy skills. Chesa also demonstrated that she was able to relate her everyday experience to the picture books to make sense of notions we discussed multiple times. Chesa responded to the characters' activism and communities with respect, empathy, understanding on many levels through her verbal response in the observation and the interviews. She also extended the ideas in the picture books to her lived experience and discussed bigger ideas with me. While using children's literature with critical literacy is not well-researched, this study ignites possible future teaching and research implications to include accurate diverse and accurate representations, teaching critical literacy with first and second languages, and awareness of themes related to diversity.

## Word Count

5989 words (cover page, content page, end-of-text reference list, and appendix exclusive)

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions & Code Chart

N.B.: Bold phrases are major codes included in the article. Questions for clarification were asked during the interview.

Major Questions	<i>I am Rosa Parks</i>	<i>Emmeline Pankhurst</i>
Did you have any difficulties understanding the book? If so, what were they?	N/A	N/A
What are some similarities and differences between you and Mrs Parks/Pankhurst?	Similarities: <b>Equality</b> , similar human conditions Differences: Characteristics	Similarities: Female Differences: <b>Social change</b> , raising awareness, bravery, <b>determination</b>
		(I presented that the suffragettes used multiple un-mentioned tactics in the book and asked if Chesa would change the book.)
What do you think about Mrs Parks'/Pankhurst's group?	<b>Humanity, drawing personal experience, resistance, bravery, unity, social change</b>	Strong, fierce, <b>personal beliefs, sense of community</b>
Do you think that respecting differences can help us in school?	<b>Right and wrong</b> , avoiding judgements, avoiding personal comments, respect, <b>drawing personal experience</b> , race, <b>inherent qualities</b> , and <b>accepting difference</b>	<b>Supporting the others, respecting differences</b> , rights, responsibilities
What does fairness mean to you?	<b>respect, treatment</b> , race, <b>equality, avoiding judgements, equality, empathy</b>	<b>Same resources, distributive justice</b> , diversity
If we were given the the same resources, but I actually need more to help with my situation, and you don't need as much. Should we get the same resources in the first place?	(not asked)	distributive justices; <b>resource re-distribution</b>
What does diversity mean to you?	(not asked)	<b>identity</b> , different difficulties, different abilities, respect, fair