

## IJIDI: Book Review

Court, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Reading by right: Successful strategies to ensure every child can read to succeed*. London: Facet Publishing. ISBN 9781783302093. 256 pp. \$77 US.

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**R**eading by Right examines the state of reading in the United Kingdom, and explores questions librarians, parents, teachers and other educators continually ask: What factors help a student become a proficient reader? How can adults instill a love of reading in children and help reluctant readers embrace reading? Written with teachers, parents, librarians, academic researchers, and reading and language specialists in mind, *Reading by Right* offers answers to these frequently asked questions. The variety of edited essays in the 11 chapters of this book cover many topics related to reading and literacy. Using a global perspective, this book provides examples of activities, policies, and other strategies proven to help children become better readers. Such strategies included establishing reading clubs, use of audio books, providing books for babies for in-home use, and reading aloud to children, as well as continued professional development for school and children's librarians.

Readers will benefit from learning about the experiences shared through recent research findings, new approaches and case studies, and issues related to reading and literacy in other countries. They will find shared concerns and transferable solutions for improving reading ability and expanding literacy for youth. The notes, websites, and other references listed at the end of each chapter are particularly useful resources for further reference.

Although the editor, Joy Court, mentions that every child has a right to read and that teachers and librarians have a social responsibility to ensure that right, this concept deserved much more discussion in this collection of essays. Chapter 7, "Reflecting Readers: Ensuring that No One is Excluded" provides *some* discussion of diversity in children's book collections, such as the issue of authenticity and diverse authorships, however; the inclusion of essays and studies showing the links between access to books, and literacy, employment, and social mobility as well as cultural bias in children's literature would have further strengthened the book's social justice aspect.

Equity of access is an important factor to consider when discussing children's literacy. According to the American Library Association (2018):

"Literacy as a social justice issue means that all people have equitable access to the skills and resources they need to fully participate as literate individuals in society—to communicate, analyze, criticize, synthesize, and create information. It considers structural barriers to that access, such as the inequitable distribution of resources, and the impact those barriers can have across lifetimes, generations,

and outcomes. The correlation between literacy and income inequality, health outcomes, and rates of incarceration, among other issues of social and economic justice, underscores how literacy intersects with equity, access, and inclusion.” (“Equity of Access”).

Although there is *some* mention of economic factors and the ability to read, a more in-depth discussion of these issues would have been valuable. For instance, libraries and schools in more affluent areas tend to have more books and higher quality of resources than those in poorer neighborhoods. Book ownership is an important factor in improving reading ability, as is ownership of educational games and computer technology, however, these are luxuries for many families with low and moderate incomes. Further discussion of these economic factors and the role libraries and educational institutions can play to fill the gap for less affluent communities warrants more examination in this text.

The impact of immigration, migration, and the intermingling of cultures on reading and literacy is also discussed in Chapter 7. According to Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2016), two centuries ago only a small elite of the world population had the ability to read and write—the best estimates are that 12% of the world population was literate. Over the course of the 20th century the rapid progress in education resulted in an increase in global literacy rates. But despite this increase, inequities still exist, and many people have been left behind and remain illiterate. Many countries in the world are experiencing increased immigration, migration, and societal changes which impacts reading and raises questions of cultural literacy. The issue of cultural literacy and shared culture is a growing factor in societies that were formerly demographically homogenous. The body of shared knowledge and agreed upon standards of literacy must be examined in discussing literacy and teaching reading. According to Erickson (2007), “Aspects of invisible culture are often used as diagnostic indicators with clinical significance, especially in the early grades” (p. 53). As a result, immigrant parents who are illiterate in their first language often face increased challenges while their children are learning to read in a second language.

A chapter in this book that examines the impact of the broader cultures’ assessment of literacy is needed. This also brings up the issue of cultural bias in reading materials, attitudes towards literacy, and methods used to teach reading, which also require more examination. Population movement results in greater diversity. As such, the publishing industry needs to be more inclusive and publish books for children that represents a wider range of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and lifestyles. A chapter from a publisher of diverse books for children would have been an important perspective to include in this book.

The lack of diversity in publishing, and authorship in books for young people is also discussed in Chapter 7. An example used in this chapter is the children’s picture book *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman, which raises the issue of unauthenticity in authors’ efforts to portray diverse characters in this children’s books. The question of authentic voice is an important issue in children’s literature. Writers often create characters whose culture and experiences differ vastly from their own. Sometimes the portrayal is successful; often it is not. There is a fundamental difference between writing about an experience that has been *lived* and writing about an experience that is *imagined*. As Chhibber (2014) states, “It’s about recognizing that there are inherent racial issues that exist inside publishing a book with multicultural themes written by a person who doesn’t have a historical connection to that culture or race” (para.1). Nuances of the “lived” experience are often missed by those outside a culture as depth of

understanding of cultural attitudes, motivations, and values are often missing. Characters developed by these authors often do not ring true to members of these groups portrayed.

Reese and Mendoza (2015) share thoughts on the disrespectful representations in the children's book *Amazing Grace*. This often selected, and presumably well-intentioned, book written by an author outside of Native American and African American culture had serious flaws that made many American Indian and African American librarians and educators cringe. The stereotypical racist depiction of the African American girl dressed as an American Indian, with paint on her face, and without clothes from the waist up, was removed in later editions—only for books sold in the U.S.—after complaints were raised and advocacy for its removal ensued.

Teachers and librarians select books for children of many ethnicities using various criteria. One often overlooked valuable resource to help select books is staff and colleagues from representative groups. Another useful tool is the American Indians in Children's Literature (AICL) (<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>) website, which provides critical perspectives and analysis of Indigenous peoples in children and young adult books, the school curriculum, popular culture, and society. A discussion of other methods to develop and promote ethnically and culturally diverse authors of books for children would have been an important inclusion and is the one area not fully explored in this book.

In conclusion, although this text offers examples of experiences and case studies from a variety of countries, it will prove valuable to practitioners of reading in the U.S. and other countries. The results of these studies and strategies, and knowledge gained is transferable, and I recommend it for teachers, other educators, librarians and practitioners in the field of literacy, as well as academics in literacy and library studies.

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