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## Building Confidence of Academic Library Staff in the Selection of Culturally Authentic Native American Picture Books

Cassondra Leeport  
cassondra.leeport@go.mnstate.edu

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Building Confidence of Academic Library Staff in the  
Selection of Culturally Authentic Native American Picture Books

A Project Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By  
Cassondra Leeport

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in  
Curriculum & Instruction

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to explore the confidence and ability of library staff to select and identify culturally authentic Native American picture books. The researcher, a self-identified Native American, developed a tool designed to assist in library staff in identifying key elements of a picture book that lend themselves to a work being culturally authentic. Assisting patrons in selecting materials is a key element in the library profession. The setting of this research is a university with a large Professional Education Program as well as a documented dedication to serving Native students and surrounding tribal communities and the participants of the study were library staff. This puts the library staff in a unique position of often assisting students and community members in finding culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. The study was done with an online survey consisting of both qualitative and quantitative questions and required the participants to each read and evaluate two picture books. It was determined that the tool was successful in increasing the confidence of all participants and all participants are very likely to utilize the tool again in their professional practice.

### **DEDICATION**

For my partner and best friend Patrick,

Miigwech for your encouragement, your lengthy (but kind and constructive) feedback on my research process, taking the kiddos for walks so I could think, and for always being in my corner.

For my sweet daughters Helen and Delilah,

Reading with you inspired this research. May we always find joy in reading together and sharing stories of our family. Also, Miigwech for being such good sleepers so momma could get all my homework and writing done during nap and bedtime.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

As the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion become more commonplace in not only academia, but also in the vernacular of the general population, there is an increasing need for authentic voices within these conversations. For reasons unknown, Native people seem to be consistently left out, or largely excluded, from discussions of multicultural literature. Although Native Americans are the original inhabitants of North America, they are often left out of many multicultural discussions or listed as “other” due to seemingly inconsequential numbers. For the purposes of this paper, the terms Native, Native Americans, American Indian, and Indigenous will be used interchangeably and includes the over 500 federally recognized tribes that reside within the geographic borders of the United States and reflects the great diversity of geography, language, socioeconomic status, and spiritual and traditional practices. The inclusion of appropriate education regarding Native histories, historical trauma, and contemporary life varies greatly. Education has played a key role in shaping contemporary Native life and historical trauma, and yet when it comes to leading the charge regarding these new and sometimes difficult discussions surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion, educators are often the first people society turns to. Librarians and library staff are often viewed as the gatekeepers of knowledge and are often leaders of these difficult conversations.

Effective library advocates require appropriate training. Bemidji State University strives to be a destination university for Native students and tries to be inclusive of the surrounding Native communities in its institutional priorities. Bemidji is centrally located between three reservations: Leech Lake Nation, Red Lake Nation, and White Earth Nation. This means that library staff at Bemidji State University serve a diverse population of both students and community members hailing from surrounding communities with large numbers of Native Americans. In addition, the A.C. Clark Library at

Bemidji State University boasts a robust children's book collection geared at assisting students in the Professional Education Program in learning to select books for their own future classrooms. Professional Education students often come to the library for assistance in selecting diverse picture books for a variety of assignments, and the turn to library staff for assistance. The library's collection is diverse, but not all diverse books are made equally. The collection has contemporary titles, and an effort is made when purchasing for this collection to be inclusive and authentic in its collection development choices. However, this collection is also historical, and it contains books that were once hailed to be great, but their content has not aged gracefully. These books still serve a purpose in the general scope of educating students, but that is why library staff must be actively engaged in assisting with and knowing how to identify culturally authentic diverse materials, and for the purposes of this research, specific to Native Americans.

The focus of this research is on Native American picture books for several reasons. First, the researcher self-identifies as Native American, and is the only Native American on staff at Bemidji State University. Additionally, this research provided an opportunity for professional development to increase knowledge and ability of library staff in working with Native American resources. This is in line with larger Academic Plans of Bemidji State University to incorporate more aspects of American Indian culture and history into all aspects of curriculum.

## **Brief Literature Review**

### ***Cultural Authenticity***

Although it is commonly agreed upon that multicultural literature should be "authentic" there is no one clear definition of what that means. In *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, Short and Fox (2003) acknowledge that the reader may have a different notion of cultural authenticity than the researcher. Because of this, the author of each individual piece within



*Stories Matter* defines the term for themselves. The definitions included in this piece vary, as one would assume, but some overarching themes include specific details of everyday life and language, a consistent feeling of belonging and familiarity, accuracy of history, setting, characters, and language, and absence of stereotypical portrayals (Bishop, 2003; Guavera, 2003; Mo & Shen, 1997, Rochman, 2003). For the purposes of this paper, Native cultural authenticity means an accurate and specific reflection of the worldview of the specific tribe or tribes being discussed.

### ***Picture Books and Education***

Picture books help to affirm and develop children's understandings of their own identity as well as the world around them (Hill, 2011; Morgan & Forest, 2016; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Yoo-Lee, et al., 2014). Morgan & Forest (2016) continue this further by stating, "it will be difficult for young learners to feel good about themselves if their group is left out of school materials and other groups are included or if they are not offered materials in their native language" (p. 80). Children assume that what they read is true, and that is why the books chosen to use in classrooms is so important.

### ***Diversity Training***

It has also been found that there is a population of educators that have little to no training in multicultural education and selection of materials even though it is now a commonly held belief that children should be exposed to diverse cultures in their educational settings (Iwai, 2013; Jewett, 2011; Smith & Wiese, 2006; Smith-D 'Arezzo & Musgrove, 2011). In addition, it has been commonly believed that training education students, prospective library staff fall under the scope of education students in this case, to work effectively with Native students is an act of social justice (McInnes, 2017). Therefore, it is such a crucial step to not only include Native perspectives in education curriculum for all grades, but it

is also essential to instruct future educators in specific Native histories and contemporary life, especially as it pertains locally.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The burden of informing their non-Native peers on what is and is not “appropriate” often falls heavily on Native educators and librarians. While those voices are crucial in discussions of cultural authenticity, all library staff and educators should have a foundational knowledge, ability, and confidence to identify culturally authentic books when assisting patrons in the library. If library staff were taught how to utilize a tool developed by a Native educator to select culturally authentic Native picture books, they will more easily and confidently be able to identify what makes a book culturally authentic to Natives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the efficacy of a tool to be used by library staff needing to make selections of culturally authentic Native American picture books. If provided with a tool that was developed by a Native educator, can library staff more confidently select and identify culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?

### **Research Question**

How can the use of a tool help library staff increase their confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?

**Definition of Variables.** The following are the variables of study:

- Independent Variable: A tool was developed to be used as a guide for library staff to use when selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. This tool was used by all participants in the study.

- **Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable is the confidence of library staff in their ability to select a culturally appropriate picture book depicting Native Americans.

### **Significance of the Study**

Books of all kinds play a critical role in education, but picture books play a vital role in the development of people's foundational understanding of the world around them (Chaudhri & Schau, 2016). Not only do libraries need to provide culturally authentic picture books in their collections for their Native students, but it is equally as important that non-Native students are able to access culturally authentic representations of their Native peers. Therefore, a heavy weight falls on the shoulders of library staff to choose appropriate books and to guide patrons in historically inaccurate depictions of Native Americans versus culturally authentic representations within picture books in the library's collection. However, it can be very difficult for non-Native library staff to identify a culturally authentic picture book that represents Native Americans. Oftentimes, library staff rely on outside sources like National Book Awards, best-sellers, or perhaps recommendations from a Native friend in order to inform their selection decisions. While these sources can be helpful guides, they are not foolproof.

There are many examples of award-winning books that are not culturally authentic. For example, Paul Goble has won numerous awards for his books depicting Native "folk tales," and Goble even claims some Native ancestry. However, in recent years it has become well known that his books are in no way authentic to a specific Native tribe, and the origins of his stories are unknown and are seemingly only inspired by his romanticized view of Plains tribes. Additionally, not everyone has peers from all possible ethnic and/or under-represented groups nor should those peers feel obligated to be a voice for their group. Instead, tools and training should be provided to library staff in order to increase

their knowledge, ability, and confidence in identifying culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans.

## **Research Ethics**

### ***Permission and IRB Approval***

To conduct this study, the researcher received MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019).

### ***Informed Consent***

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Informed Consent Letter (See Appendix A) that the researcher provided to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants were aware that this study was conducted as part of the researcher's master's degree program and that it will benefit her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that participants understand and agree, in writing, that they were participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality was protected using pseudonyms (e.g., Staff 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined both, verbally and in writing.

### ***Limitations***

There are some limitations to this study that must be noted. These limitations include this study including mostly staff who identify as white. It would be more telling of the efficacy of this tool if teacher education students from a variety of backgrounds were sampled. In addition, only a small sample of books was utilized to create the tool. Those books were skewed towards an Ojibwe or more general Native experience to speak to the expertise and knowledge of the author. Lastly, this study was

conducted with a relatively small number of library staff all employed at the same institution. This limited number of staff and time for the sample is also cause for limitation.

## **Conclusions**

Multicultural literature is a popular conversation among library folx when discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion in education. Library staff, as well as all educators, often shoulder the burden of leading and initiating difficult conversations regarding diversity in their libraries and beyond. When needing to select picture books depicting cultures outside their own, many library staff feel ill-equipped to make those decisions on their own which often places an even heavier burden on the shoulders of their peers of those multicultural groups to guide or make their book selections. Determining cultural authenticity is a tricky matter because it is so subjective. However, this study provided library staffs a tool developed by a Native educator in hopes that the tool allows for library staff to gain increased confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. In the next chapter, extensive literature is presented to support rationale for this study including a deeper look into definitions of cultural authenticity, the role of picture books in education, and the importance of diversity training in library education programs.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This study aimed to explore cultural authenticity in picture books depicting Native Americans. Picture books and literature play a crucial role in the development of children's understanding of diversity and help to shape readers' emerging beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about the world around them (Chaudhri & Schau, 2016). Furthermore, selecting multicultural picture books for educational purposes often falls on the shoulders of librarians and educators who, many times, are outsiders or non-members of the ethnic groups they are selecting materials about. This study aimed to provide collection development guidance regarding the selection of culturally authentic Native picture books.

#### Multicultural Picture Books and the Question of Cultural Authenticity

Although research supports that multicultural literature should be culturally authentic, there is no one clear definition of what it means to be culturally authentic. In *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*, Short and Fox (2003) acknowledge that the reader may have a different notion of cultural authenticity than the researcher. Therefore, within the collection of studies and essays, each contributor brings forth their identity and experiences with cultural authenticity within their own context. Bishop (2003) defines cultural authenticity as "the extent to which a book reflects the worldview of a specific cultural group and the authenticating details of language and everyday life for members of that cultural group" (p. 5). In that same collection, Guevara defines cultural authenticity as "a work that feels alive—something true from the culture exists there" (2003, p. 9). For others, it is more than a feeling, authenticity is something that comes from accuracy (Rochman, 2003). In their study with preservice teachers and multicultural folktale adaptations, Smith & Wiese (2006) define cultural authenticity as "the extent to which the reteller, adaptor, or illustrator (1) remains

reasonably true to the original printed source, (2) accurately and respectfully represents the values and beliefs of the cultural group, and (3) responsibly depicts the geographical, historical, and cultural details” (p. 72).

It seemed that the idea of holding true to a cultural group’s values was a common thread when defining cultural authenticity, but Mo & Shen (1997) go a bit further and list several attributes that they see necessary including, “nonstereotyped portrayals, positive images, lack of derogatory language, accurate historical information and cultural details, and realistic illustrations all put together” (p. 86).

Yoo-Lee et al. (2014) in their examination of forty-five multicultural picture books depicting African American, Asian-American, and Hispanic cultures define cultural authenticity as, “not only the absence of stereotypes but also the presence of values consistent with the particular culture and the accuracy of cultural details in the text and illustrations” (p.326). This definition appears to be a summative explanation of many of the other attempts to define cultural authenticity in previous studies. The study also recognizes that the lack of a clear definition of the term has long complicated the issue of finding and selecting culturally authentic picture books. Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd (2001) did a similar study regarding cultural authenticity in works depicting African Americans. They outlined several key components of cultural authenticity including authentic illustrations of settings and characters (including a variation of skin colors), accurate information, and well-developed characters in realistic representations including dialect.

Several such studies exist to begin to create benchmarks for evaluating cultural authenticity in multicultural children’s literature, but the research done in this study was to attempt to fill the void pertaining to cultural authenticity and Native picture books.

### **The Use of Language to Affirm Cultural Authenticity**

Language is a foundational aspect of all cultures. Although language is often one component of measuring the accuracy of a work, Barrera & Quiroa (2003) focus solely on the use of authentic Spanish language within a children's book to determine cultural authenticity. It is a commonly shared belief that the books children are exposed to a young age play a pivotal role in their foundational understandings of others while also affirming their own identity and cultural background (Hill, 2011; Morgan & Forest, 2016; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Yoo-Lee, et al., 2014). Morgan & Forest (2016) continue this further by stating, "it will be difficult for young learners to feel good about themselves if their group is left out of school materials and other groups are included or if they are not offered materials in their native language" (p. 80). This is why it is incredibly important for children's books to accurately portray Native languages. Children assume that what they read is true, and children love using new words they learned while reading. Many indigenous communities have lost their Native languages or are quickly seeing the disappearance of their languages. The presence of Native language in a children's picture book is incredibly powerful for the language revitalization efforts within Native communities and should be treated with sensitivity as such.

### **The Author's Role in Providing Culturally Authentic Children's Literature**

One of the persistent questions in multicultural children's literature is whether the author must belong to the cultural group they are writing about (Hill, 2011; Chaudhri & Schau, 2016). However, this in itself can lead to controversial claims of identity, particularly for Native American books in the past (Reese, 2019). According to Hill (2011), of the thirty-four thousand titles received by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) in 2010, only thirty-one books were written by Native American authors. While being written by a member of the cultural being represented cannot guarantee authenticity, it is certainly agreed that the author's insider knowledge of a community contributes to the overall



authenticity of cultural values displayed within a work (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014; Bishop, 2003; Short & Fox, 2003).

Others argue that one can be an outsider and lack cultural membership while also contributing culturally authentic work can be eradicated through extensive, immersive research (Guevara, 2003; Mo & Shen, 1997; Noll, 2003). Debbie Reese in her 1999 article argues against that notion of being able to research your way to a cultural understanding because that requires trust in the sources you use to research. In the case of Native Americans, Reese continues that much of what is out there and available for people to research was often written by people who really didn't have a full understanding of the tribal community they were writing about. "An author can do good research, but if they haven't read the voices or writings of that particular group, then they miss the meaning," (Reese, 1999, p.36). While more and more books are being published featuring multicultural stories, additional work must be done by the librarian or educator when the time comes for collection development and/or curriculum decisions.

### **Providing Guidelines for The Selection of Culturally Authentic Children's Literature**

This study aimed to explore the task that librarians and educators must undertake when selecting multicultural picture books. Oftentimes, the librarian or educator making collection development decisions is not necessarily an insider of the ethnic group that they need to make collection development decisions about. Literature that children are exposed to consistently creates a foundation for their understanding of the world and the diversity within it. It has also been found that there is a population of educators that have little to no training in multicultural education and selection of materials even though it is now a commonly held belief that children should be exposed to diverse cultures in their educational settings (Iwai, 2013; Jewett, 2011; Smith & Wiese, 2006; Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove, 2011).

The lack of formal training regarding the selection of multicultural resources often leads educators to choosing materials from larger organizations that they deem responsible and educated to make those decisions. However, it has been found that choosing materials based on Scholastic Reading Club lists (Chaudhri & Schau, 2016) and ALA awards (Reese, 2019) is not actually a reliable source for finding culturally authentic picture books. As outsiders of the culture, educators are looking for avenues and insights into these cultures that are completely unknown or vaguely unfamiliar to them. Reese (2018) points out that

Native communities resisted historical oppression and continue to preserve [their] culture by cultivating [their] ways in private spaces-behind the curtain. While Native people share some of [their] ways publicly in the present day, there is a great deal that [they] continue to protect from outsiders. (p.391)

It can be incredibly complicated to maintain an accurate understanding of Native peoples and communities when so much about Native culture is kept private. This privacy comes from a history of exploitation as well as a desire to keep culture alive and uncolonized.

Peterson and Red Bear (2020) go so far as to suggest that educators “should create funds of knowledge about Indigenous experiences and perspectives to inform their readings of Indigenous children’s literature” (p. 285). Peterson and Red Bear do acknowledge that not everyone has an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper at their disposal, nor should that burden lie solely on those knowledge keepers. However, this ties back to the notion that an insider understanding of a culture is required to gain insight of the cultural authenticity of a work. Reese (1999) argues, “there are very tangible kinds of things within a culture that you can only get from the people of that community, meaning you have to talk to the people of the community.” Developing relationships with insiders of various cultural groups and utilizing tools, such as what is suggested in this study is one way for educators to retrain their

understandings and acknowledge their own bias when selecting picture books depicting Native communities.

Although it is not possible for one librarian or educator to be able to be an insider or every Native community, this study aimed to provide a framework for those librarians and educators to base their collection development decisions regarding picture books about Native communities on. Providing this framework for the selection of culturally authentic Native picture books is consistent with some of the ideas Paulo Freire (2000) asserts in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire argues that educators and education can keep people in their inferior social status or education can help to lift people and fight to make systemic change. While I cannot say that this study will create an unstoppable change in the depths of Native depictions in picture books, I do believe it is a step forward in a larger conversation.

### **Research Question**

How can the use of a tool help library staff increase their confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?

### **Conclusions**

This chapter reviewed studies and findings related to the question of cultural authenticity in children's literature. It is important to remember that there is no one Native American experience because there are over 500 different tribes within the border of the United States and, like any other culture, has many values and aspects that make up one's life experiences. Defining cultural authenticity is not an easy task or a term with a clear and concise answer. Cultural authenticity has many layers, and those layers can be defined in many ways. Some common threads include accuracy of cultural details, use of native languages, avoidance of stereotypes, and appropriate inclusion of cultural values. While many argue that authors should be a member of the cultural group they write about, this is not a

universal belief. It is, however, commonly held to be true that the person declaring a work to be culturally authentic should, in fact, be an “insider” of the culture.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

This research study aimed to assist library staff in gaining confidence in selecting and identifying culturally authentic Native American picture books. In doing so, this study worked with library staff employed at an institution with a large children's book collection geared toward educating students in the Professional Education Program. By having library staff evaluate picture books depicting Native Americans on their own and with the use of a tool to assist in identifying markers of cultural authenticity, the researcher was able to determine the efficacy of the tool and the impact it had on the confidence and ability of library staff to identify culturally authentic texts.

#### **Research Question**

How can the use of a tool help library staff increase their confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?

#### **Research Design**

This study had a mixed-methods approach. The study was conducted in person and data were collected via an online survey. However, the questions in the survey were both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

#### **Setting**

This study took place at a four-year university in North Central Minnesota. Some demographic information of the university includes:

- Approximately 5,100 undergraduate and over 300 graduate students
- 53% female; 47% male

- 19.5:1 student/faculty ratio
- Students hail from 36 different states and 38 different countries (88% from Minnesota)
- 82% of students receive some financial aid
- 84% of students self identify as white; 2% Native American or Alaska Native; 3% International Students, 3% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Black or African American, 4% two or more, 1% Asian

The university is most known for environmental stewardship, civic engagement, and global and multicultural understanding. The university is situated between three large Ojibwe reservations, and it is also working toward being a destination university for Native American students from across the country. The participants of this study are employed by the University's library. The library has a large children's book collection, which is unique for an academic library. However, this University began as a Teacher College in 1919, and the Professional Education Program is still one of the largest and most popular degree programs. The children's book collection provides a collection of books that support the curricula of both the University's Professional Education and English departments, allowing teachers in training access to a wealth of fiction, non-fiction, and picture books for grade-level appropriate teaching and learning.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were employed at the University's library during the Summer of 2021. All library staff were invited to participate including Librarians, Library Technicians, and Student Workers. While not all of these employees directly engage in assisting patrons with the selection of appropriate materials, all staff were invited as an opportunity for professional development.

**Sampling**

The participants were chosen by convenience sampling. The researcher also works at the University's library. During the summer of 2021, the library had 14 employees, one of those being the researcher. The other thirteen were invited to participate.

**Instrumentation**

This research study relied heavily upon the use of a tool to help library staff better identify culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. The tool was developed by the researcher, a self-identified Native American educator with descendency from a Minnesota Ojibwe tribe. This tool was developed using the researcher's own understanding of cultural authenticity regarding Native communities as well as with the context of other studies that have been done in similar topics. A 2014 study by Yoo-Lee et. al. used a two-part system to determine cultural authenticity in multicultural picture books depicting African Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latinx populations. In addition, the researcher relied heavily on common themes that appeared in the evaluation of picture books done by Debbie Reese on her well-known blog, *American Indians in Children's Literature*.

The tool (Appendix B) created for this research study consists of a table that library staff fill out while examining a picture book. It requires the library staff to think critically about all aspects of the book that can lead to a book being culturally authentic or not. Some of the elements on this table include information about the author, publisher, setting of the book, references to specific tribal affiliations, accurate use of dialects or indigenous languages, presence of stereotypical features, inclusion of a reference list, and more. There is no set formula to determine a work's level of cultural authenticity. It can feel overwhelming to look at a book as a whole and judge if the book is an accurate depiction of Native Americans, but the tool provides a framework for library staff to be able to break

down the elements of the picture book and then use their own knowledge and background to be able to critically examine those elements.

The tool should be used as a guide and can be filled out as much or as little as needed by the library staff using it. For each picture book, it could take a few minutes to fill out the table or someone could really dig into each element with careful thought and research and end up spending hours. The idea behind the tool is that library staff can take as much time as they need with each picture book and the tool in order to get a sense of the cultural authenticity of the work. Some books jump out as being clearly a great resource and their authenticity bursts from cover to cover. Other books take more time and evaluation. With practice, it is the researcher's hope that the tool will become a mental framework that library staff can apply to all resources depicting Native Americans once the tool has increased their confidence in knowing how to evaluate those resources.

### **Data Collection**

The research sample consists of library staff in the library where the researcher is employed. Therefore, the research was done in person, but the survey was completed online for anonymity of staff. First, library staff were provided with an introduction of the study and informed consent letter. Then, library staff were set up at a computer station and took the presurvey. After that, they begin to read the provided children's books from the library's collection. Each participant was assigned two books to read. The participants read both books once and answered questions based on their existing knowledge. They were then provided with the tool and asked to reevaluate each book. After reading their books, participants completed the postsurvey. Finally, once the postsurvey was completed, participants were provided with a document (Appendix C) that provides them with the "answer key" for each of the selected picture books. This document gives some additional context regarding the cultural



authenticity of each picture book and which elements of those books should have been a clear indicator of whether the book should be considered culturally authentic or not.

### Data Analysis.

The pre survey is purely quantitative. A table and mean values were calculated. The post surveys consist of both qualitative and quantitative data. Due to the small sample size, the data quantitative data was compiled in a table with mean values calculated for each question. In addition, some simple coding was done to the qualitative answers to gather trending responses.

### Research Question and System Alignment.

**Table 3.1.**

**Research Question Alignment**

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique	Source
How can the use of a tool help library staff increase their confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?	IV: Cultural Authenticity Identifier Tool DV: Ability & confidence of staff in identifying culturally authentic books	Online Survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions	Evaluation of picture books with and without provided tool	Cultural authenticity and the perception of it is subjective. The researcher kept this in mind when collecting and evaluating data.	Online Survey	Library Staff of an Academic Library at a University in North Central Minnesota

## **Procedures**

This research was conducted in person at the library during the month of June. In June, the researcher met with library staff to describe the research and provide the Informed Consent letter. Staff were provided with a checklist of required materials for the research. The research questions are answered via a Qualtrics survey. The researcher was on site and available for questions as needed.

## ***Elements of the Online Survey***

1. Presurvey:
  - a. Question 1: Library Employment Status (Student Worker or Professional Staff)
  - b. Question 2: Gender
  - c. Question 3: How would you self-identify your ethnicity? (List provided)
  - d. Question 4: Hometown (City, State)
  - e. Question 5: Rate your level of confidence in selecting and identifying culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans.
  - f. Question 6: Rate your level of familiarity with contemporary and historical information regarding Native Americans.
2. Main Content of the Survey
  - a. Select the title of the first book you read
  - b. Question 1: Is this book culturally authentic? Yes or No
  - c. Question 2: What factors led you to this decision? Open ended
  - d. Select the title of the second book you read
  - e. Question 1: Is this book culturally authentic? Yes or No
  - f. Question 2: What factors led you to this decision? Open ended
3. Provide them with the tool and ask them to reevaluate each book

- a. Question 1: After using the tool, has your answer changed regarding the cultural authenticity of Book 1?
  - i. Yes (No>Yes)
  - ii. Yes (Yes>No)
  - iii. No (still no)
  - iv. No (still yes)
- b. Question 2: What factors led you to this decision?
- c. Question 3: Which element of the tool was most helpful in helping you decide authenticity? (Provide a list of all elements and have them select 3)
- d. Question 1: After using the tool, has your answer changed regarding the cultural authenticity of Book 2?
  - i. Yes (No>Yes)
  - ii. Yes (Yes>No)
  - iii. No (still no)
  - iv. No (still yes)
- e. Question 2: What factors led you to this decision?
- f. Question 3: Which element of the tool was most helpful in helping you decide authenticity? (Provide a list of all elements and have them select 3)
4. Provide “answer key” (Appendix C) describing each book’s authenticity and rationale.
5. Post survey
  - a. Question 1: Is this tool something you would like to use in the future to aid in selecting culturally authentic materials depicting Native Americans?
  - b. Question 2: Do you feel more confident in identifying culturally authentic picture books after utilizing the tool?

c. Question 3: An open-ended space for reflection

The research was done over the course of one week and the researcher compiled the results the following week.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is a fine line to define what is and is not authentic to a person's culture or personal experience. This is something acknowledged by the research whole-heartedly. This study is not an attempt to define a person's experience as authentic or not, but instead the purpose of the study is to help engage others in the conversations surrounding cultural authenticity. This study was approved by the Minnesota State University-Moorhead IRB team. See Appendix D for approval letter.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter discussed the collection and analysis of the data for this research study. This research study involves the use of a tool that was created by the researcher to assist in providing a framework for library staff to select and evaluate culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. In the following chapters, the data, conclusions, and possibilities for future research are presented.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

This study was conducted to determine if the use of a tool could help increase the confidence of library staff in their ability to identify and select materials, specifically picture books depicting Native Americans, that are culturally authentic. The university where this research was done has a large number of Native American students and is surrounded by three reservations. One of the largest programs on campus is Professional Education. Because of this, picture books do hold a significant space in the library collection and staff are regularly involved in selecting titles for the collection and assisting students and community members in finding picture books. A particular emphasis is placed on diverse picture books at several times during the year based on campus activities and class assignment. The researcher is the only Native American on the library staff, and there is one additional library staff who is the assigned liaison to the Indigenous Studies program. However, selection of materials and patron assistance are tasks that fall, in one way or another, on all library staff. A tool was created by the researcher, a self-identified Native American and library practitioner, with the intent that the tool would make selection and identification of culturally authentic titles easier for library staff and that using the tool would increase the confidence of library staff.

#### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through an online survey. The process of completing the research required a few stages. The first stage required participants to answer a few pre-survey questions, read two picture books that were assigned by the researcher, answer questions about those books based solely on their own background knowledge. Then, they were provided with the tool created by the researcher. Participants were then asked to re-evaluate the picture books they had just read by utilizing the tool. The final stage required participants to answer a few post-survey questions. All library staff were invited

to participate in the study and the researcher did not require participants to be physically in the library to complete the survey. The survey was completed entirely online through Qualtrics.

## Results

### **Research Question: How can the use of a tool help library staff increase their confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans?**

Five library staff participated in this research study. Of those five staff, three identified as Male and two as female and four identified as white and one as Asian. Two librarians, one library technician, and two student workers participated. Participants were asked to indicate their level of confidence in identifying and selecting culturally authentic picture books depicting native Americans before and after the survey. Table 4.1 shows the data for those ratings.

**Table 4.1**

#### *Participant Confidence Levels and Demographic Information*

	Pre-Survey: Confidence of Selecting and Identifying culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans	Post-Survey: Confidence of Selecting and Identifying culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans	Change in Confidence
Participant A	3	5	+2
Participant B	3	5	+2
Participant C	3	4	+1
Participant D	3	5	+2
Participant E	3	4	+1
Average	3	4.6	+1.6

*Note. Participants indicated their confidence on a scale from Excellent (5) to Terrible (1).*

All participants had an increase in confidence in their abilities after using the tool created by the researcher. All participants also indicated that they would “definitely” utilize the tool again in the future.

Five picture books were chosen to use in this study. All five participants were able to correctly identify the cultural authenticity of at least one of their assigned books based on their own background knowledge and initial thoughts. After utilizing the tool, all participants correctly identified the cultural authenticity of both of their assigned books.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from this study were carefully organized and evaluated. Table 4.1 shows that all participants started off the study with an average level of self-reported confidence in their abilities to identify culturally authentic resources. After completing the research process, all five participants reported an increase in their confidence of their abilities to identify culturally authentic resources. These results were the intended outcome of the research, and the framework tool developed by the researcher has been tested to be successful. While these were the intended results, there were qualitative portions of the research study that gave the researcher further data to improve upon the tool.

Some interesting data that came from the participants included anecdotal information about the processes participants used to work through the tool. Many participants discussed looking up author information, award history, and other similar information about each title a participant was assigned. Although the researcher intended for participants to look up additional information about each book there was no space within the survey to collect specific information-seeking behavior of the participants. Knowing where and how participants looked up information about authors and books would be very helpful in order to adapt the tool to fit the information-seeking behaviors of the user.

Defining cultural authenticity is a difficult task. While conducting the literature review for this research, multiple definitions for cultural authenticity were found. Ultimately, for the purposes of this research, cultural authenticity was defined as, “an accurate and specific reflection of the worldview of the specific tribe or tribes or Native persons being discussed.” Coming to an agreed definition of what

makes something culturally authentic was a challenge, and so it comes as no surprise that trying to identify picture books as culturally authentic, or not, was also quite a challenge.

One participant left a lengthy note about their hesitation about one specific book they were assigned.

The participant worked through their existing knowledge of the book's topic, water protectors and pipeline protests, while also looking up new information on the topic. Specific details were something referred to consistently in the tool, and this participant had a clear struggle coming to a decision about their identification of this book as authentic or not. Ultimately, they decided that the book was indeed culturally authentic, but they also said in their comments they could make an argument against its authenticity as well. The participant was unclear if the additional sections of the book that provided more information about water protectors was considered "part of the book." The book this participant struggled with was *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom and illustrated by Michaela Goade. This book is a fantastic contemporary example of a culturally authentic picture book depicting Native Americans written and illustrated by Native Americans/Indigenous people. It was originally thought that this book would be a clear and easy example for participants to see the authenticity of the book and the story, but based on this participants feedback, the researcher has found tangible ways to improve the tool, such as including a section of the tool describing the importance of context and additional notes provided by the author.

Although the researcher originally intended for all 12 library staff to participate in the research, that was not possible due to the timing of the study and schedule conflicts over the summer. A few staff also opted not to participate in the study. Five participants still allowed for data analysis to occur, but more participants would have given an even better understanding of the efficacy of the tool. The survey used to collect the data was easy to use for both the researcher and the participants. In hindsight, additional questions should have been asked to gauge the participants feelings when using the tool, but



the findings are complete, and the researcher is satisfied with the data that was collected. If this study were to be replicated some additional questions added to the survey would include:

- Which area of the tool did you find most helpful?
- How often do you select or assist in locating picture books depicting Native Americans?
- Are there any areas of the tool you'd like further instruction on?
- Are you open to further conversations on this topic?

## **Conclusions**

There is seemingly a clear connection in this research study with a person's confidence and their ability to perform the task in question. While this may not always be true, it was for this study. Creating an inclusive and representative collection and a knowledgeable and skilled staff are goals of most libraries. Five library staff participated in the research process for this study. All five self-reported an average level of confidence before beginning the survey and reported an increase in their confidence in their abilities to identify culturally authentic picture books depicting Native Americans. All participants also reported that they would "definitely" use the tool again in their professional work.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

#### Action Plan

The results of this study suggest that providing library staff with a framework tool in making collection decisions is successful. All participants of this study were not Native American, and they all self-reported an average level of knowledge and understanding of historical and contemporary information regarding Native Americans. However, after utilizing the tool developed by the researcher all participants correctly identified their assigned books as culturally authentic or not. Library staff are constantly required to make collection decision and assist with research topics that are outside their own areas of expertise or cultural identities.

One participant told the researcher after the survey was done that they intend to see if a framework or tool exists for other areas of their collection development duties since they have “relied solely on recommendations and awards” for past decisions. In addition, this tool allowed for library staff to develop a better sense of understanding of the topic of cultural authenticity that they will be able to apply to other resources depicting Native Americans as well, not just for picture books.

#### Plan for Sharing

All the participants of the study are current library employees and have expressed interest in learning about the results. Other staff, including some that did not participate, have also expressed an interest in the findings. The research findings will be presented at the Fall Staff Retreat. This is a relatively informal event where staff come together to reflect and plan for the future of the library. Several staff have engaged the researcher in whether there are similar actions we can take or tools that can be made for other areas of research and collection development. In addition, the researcher is planning to make necessary adjustments to the tool and then the Research & Instruction Librarian would like to add the tool to the training documents for reference services. The researcher also learned

that a copy of the study will be added to the Special Collections of the library with other research that has been done by library staff.

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**APPENDIX A**

March 21, 2021

1500 Birchmont Dr NE  
Bemidji, MN 56601

Dear library staff,

You have been invited to participate in a study to see if using a provided tool helps to build knowledge and confidence in selecting culturally authentic Native American picture books.

You have been selected as an employee of A.C. Clark Library. If you decide to participate, please understand that you will be asked to do the following as part of an optional professional development opportunity.

1. Answer multiple choice and short answer questions about the cultural authenticity of several selected picture books depicting Native Americans based on your existing knowledge of Native culture.
2. Answer those same questions about the same books one more time, but with the assistance of a selection tool designed by a Native educator.
3. Answer a brief survey about your confidence in identifying appropriate Native picture books with and without the tool.

I am using this research to complete requirements for my master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Minnesota State University-Moorhead. Dr. Westhoff has granted me permission to present this research to you, but as adults, you need to consent to participate. If you sign this form, you are giving me your consent to use the information I gather. All information used will be confidential, no names will be gathered.

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have about this study. You can reach me at [cassy.leeport@bemidjistate.edu](mailto:cassy.leeport@bemidjistate.edu).

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep. You are making the decision about whether to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the above and decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

**APPENDIX B**

## Tool to Evaluate Cultural Authenticity in Picture Books Depicting Native Americans

	<i>Please answer the question or fill in information in the space provided below</i>	<i>Additional Notes/Thoughts</i>
<b>Author Information</b> (Tribal affiliation, educational background, other information relevant to the story)		
<b>Illustrator Information</b> (Tribal affiliation, educational background, other information relevant to the story)		
<b>Book Title</b> (What does the title tell you about the story?)		
<b>Characters</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are stereotypes present in the character descriptions or illustrations?</li> <li>• What is the social role of the characters?</li> <li>• Genders and ages</li> <li>• Relationships between characters</li> <li>• Specific Tribal Affiliations mentioned</li> <li>• Do the characters use indigenous languages or dialects?</li> </ul>		
<b>Setting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the setting historical or contemporary? How do you know?</li> <li>• Is a specific reservation, city, region, etc. mentioned or described?</li> <li>• Are there special places? Family homes, spiritual or ceremonial places, powwows, etc.</li> </ul>		
<b>Stereotypical features</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some common stereotypes including headdresses or wearing regalia in everyday life, alcohol use, broken family structures, living in teepees, poverty, long braided hair, etc.</li> <li>• Are these present in the text or the illustrations or both?</li> </ul>		
<b>Additional Information</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a reference list included?</li> <li>• Is there tribal context given?</li> <li>• Has this book won any awards?</li> <li>• Where and when was the book published</li> </ul>		

## APPENDIX C

### Cultural Authenticity and Rationale for Each of the Selected Picture Books

1. Child, B. J., Jourdain, G., & Thunder, J. (2018). *Bowwow powwow: Bagosenjige-niimi'idim*. Minnesota Historical Society Press.
  - a. Culturally Authentic: YES
  - b. Rationale: The author, illustrator, and translator are all enrolled members of federally recognized tribes, and this information is provided at the end of the book. It is clear from the illustrations, the use of local terms, and the use of Ojibwe language that this book is an accurate depiction of the author and illustrator's own experiences with powwows, family, and their reservation life. It is tribally specific, it is set in contemporary life, and it beautifully captures Ojibwe people in present day.
2. Lindstrom, C. & Goade, M. (2020). *We are water protectors*, Roaring Brook Press.
  - a. Culturally Authentic: YES
  - b. Rationale: To quote from the blog, American Indians in Children's Literature, this book is "an exquisite book by two Indigenous women: Carole Lindstrom is of Anishinaabe/Métis descent and is tribally enrolled with the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe. Michaela Goade is of Tlingit descent and is tribally enrolled with the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska." The illustrations were inspired from actual photos taken at water protector events and protests. This book won the Caldecott Medal, which hopefully means children around the world will get a beautiful insight into the fight of Water Protectors. The illustrations, while not tribally specific, depict indigenous peoples of all kinds because this issue of pipelines and the protection of water is not a tribally specific issue.
3. Goble, P. (1978). *The girl who loved wild horses*, Aladdin.
  - a. Culturally Authentic: NO
  - b. Rationale: This book is an award winner, and it has been a beloved children's book for decades. However, in recent years more has come to light about the works of Paul Goble. The use of tipis and buffaloes, makes the reader think this story must be story from a Plains tribe, but no specific tribe is ever mentioned in the story nor the notes on the cover. The Great Plains is home to dozens of unique tribes, and there are no sources within the story crediting a specific tribe. It is unclear if this story even originated from a tribe or if this story is purely a fictional creation of Goble's.

The copy we used includes a note reading,

When a book like this has been read in the classroom, students are sometimes asked to write their own "Indian" stories. It is not asked with bad intentions, but it belittles these traditional stories, suggesting that any child can invent them. When studying the Greek myths, or the legends of King Arthur, or Bible stories, students would never be asked to invent stories in the manner of... Instead, children should be encouraged to write down the stories in their own words to help remember them. Over the years they will come to think about the inner meanings which all these stories hold.



While this inclusion is great, is this not what Goble himself has done? If this book is indeed culturally authentic, then there should have been inclusions of sources, specific tribes, and credit to the origin of the story.

4. Martin, Jr., B., Archambault, J. & Rand, T. (1997). *Knots on a counting rope*, Square Fish.
  - a. Culturally Authentic: NO
  - b. Rationale: This book entirely plays on romantic tropes of Native American stereotypes. The dialogue sounds like what people who have never met a Native person thinks Natives talk like, "I hear it in the wounded wind," for example is one of those lines. Additionally, there is not specific tribe mentioned. The outfits come from mixed tribes with some Southwest influences which is consistent with some Southwest elements of the setting, but again, it is not specific to one tribe. The hairstyles, jewelry, and facial features are also all a mixed bag with various tribal influences. All of this, however, is very difficult for a non-native to know by reading this book.

Using the tool, here are the elements that could have helped in identifying this book as not culturally authentic. In the illustrations, while watching a horse race, the Native characters are dressed in traditional clothing. In a contemporary setting, Native people would be dressed just like everybody else. Ask yourself, do you see Native people in clothes like this daily? A horse race is not an occasion for regalia. In addition, the authors are not Native, and there are no sources or specific tribes credited for the story or the information. The way the characters speak should also be an indicator since it is a very stereotyped portrayal of Natives.

5. Noble Maillard, K. & Martinez-Neal, J. (2019). *Fry Bread: A Native American family story*, Roaring Brook Press.
  - a. Culturally Authentic: YES
  - b. Rationale: When you open the book the lining pages are filled with the names of federally recognized tribes. They are all there! This is a clear visual indicator that the author recognizes those tribes. Fry bread is not specific to one tribe. As the book discusses, fry bread came out of creativity in how to make government commodities taste good! The characters in the book have a wide range of skin tones and hair colors, and they are all dressed in contemporary clothing. This too is indicative of its authentic nature. The Author's Note provides SO MUCH rich context for the history of fry bread and the representation of the people in the illustrations. The note even discusses the modern controversy of Native health and the impact frybread has had on it. This book is one for everybody and has easily accessible context for its content. The indigenous author and illustrator also share about their own families and experiences. It is authentic to their stories, and they made great efforts to make it authentic for many Native American families.

## APPENDIX D

**Institutional Review Board**

DATE: July 6, 2021

TO: Ximena Suarez-Sousa, Principal Investigator  
Cassandra Leepore, Co-InvestigatorFROM: Lisa Karch, Chair  
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Karch'.

**ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS**PROJECT TITLE: [1769178-1] Building Confidence of Academic Library Staff in the Selection of  
Culturally Authentic Native American Picture Books

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

DECISION DATE: July 6, 2021

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.104.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the [Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB](#). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University Moorhead's records.