

Trolls under the bridge: Gatekeepers limiting access to culturally relevant texts

Access to culturally relevant literature is critical in the success of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Morales, 2004). Children need to see themselves reflected in the stories included in classrooms. Unfortunately, we currently present students with relatively monolithic children's literature. Access to culturally relevant literature is often limited due to the ways gatekeepers control what books are published and by what literature is selected by administrators, librarians and teachers.

This session draws upon the evidence in literature that reflects a systematic power structure in the publishing of culturally relevant children's literature. A children's book is a product of the author, editor, publisher, distributor and consumer, therefore becoming a social issue. Publishers control the first gate of children's books production. Review journals are the second gatekeeper since they provide vital publicity. Then librarians and schools, request titles that are believed to be in popular demand based on their preferences in books (Hill, 1998). Unfortunately, many educators are not familiar with diverse cultures. Finally, texts that present diverse cultural perspectives are often targeted or challenged when they are included in the school curriculum.

This session will examine access and challenges to children's literature from a Mexican American perspective. This session will provide insight into ways students bring their cultures from home and their communities into the classroom, which we could reinforce with various types of literature such as culturally relevant, controversial topics and banned diverse books. Finally, important texts will be explored that reflect Mexican American culture that have been challenged or banned resulting in them not being accessible to children who could benefit from these texts.