

DISCUSSANT'S REMARKS

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ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR AGRICULTURAL ACCURACY

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The purpose of this study was the creation of guidelines used in the evaluation of agricultural literacy content in children's picture and informational books. The authors made a case for their work on the premise that children don't know where food comes from and that the images and accuracy of information in books for K-6 students is having an affect on their agriculture-based literacy.

The authors relied on their years of experience in public education and by consulting with technical experts in the field of library science and children's literature developed a set of guidelines for content analysis of selected books. However, we are not present information that would help the reader validate their expertise. The guidelines were tested using a panel of four people to determine inter-rater reliability. Three of the selected textbooks were deemed unacceptable by all four raters. Eight of the ten books had 100 percent agreement while the other two had 75 percent agreement. Thus, the instrument worked well as an evaluation instrument for these four individuals who had significant agricultural literacy experiences. However, I wonder if non agricultural people were to evaluate the materials would the results be the same?

This research, as does most quality research, raises more questions than it answers. While it is important that we depict agriculture as accurately as possible, it is also important that educational materials create an interest and inner desire on behalf of the reader to learn more about the subject. I'm afraid the classic book "Three Little Pigs" which was read numerous times to me and I, in turn, read to my children and grandchildren, has tainted us all. It probably would be rated unacceptable using these guidelines because pigs cannot build houses, and wolves cannot blow them down, yet the literature impact of such a story was, at least in my mind, worthy of reading over and over.

What was there about the three books that were unacceptable that caused them to be rated as unacceptable? Do you think the authors, if given your review of the textbook, would make the necessary changes to make it acceptable? Or is it the case that the author had a specific message to get across that may have added to the unacceptability? Should the text book be rated against the objectives along with the guidelines you suggested? Would a non-agricultural person reach the same conclusions as your panel of experts? The authors indicate that even though a book may pass all guidelines, a reviewer still might conclude the text is inappropriate. What are you going to do with the Content Analysis Guidelines? How do you propose to get it into use by those in the schools or publishing companies who are responsible for make textbook decisions?

The authors are to be commended for embarking on a process to help ensure that agriculture is represented in an accurate manner.