



Editorial - September 2006

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News and comment from the Editor.

The **Diversity Matters: growing markets in children's publishing** conference was a most timely event, focusing as it did on the continuing difficulties of publishing and making available books that reflect the present-day realities of multi-racial Britain, not to speak of books which reflect the history and culture of ethnic minority groups.

While it is true, as Shereen Pandit comments in her conference report on page 8 of this issue of **BfK**, that there was a feeling of déjà vu among the older participants (myself included), the enthusiasm and energy generated by the panels and workshops and the presence of new faces at such discussions gave real hope that some fresh initiatives will take place? from traineeships in publishing and bookselling to tackle institutional racism to more imaginative ways of reaching a diverse market.

Follow-up events are planned by the Arts Council and CLPE who respectively funded and organised this first conference. When this happens I hope that it will be possible to address in more detail the different strategies needed when thinking about how to apply multi-racial criteria and perspectives in respect of the different kinds of books for children.

For the most part discussion focused, unsurprisingly given that there were quite a few novelists present, on fiction and how to get more manuscripts from black and ethnic minority writers accepted. But picture books, novelty, non-fiction and reference titles require other kinds of interventions. Take picture books and novelty: it is usual for art editors or picture book editors to commission sample artwork and then involve the rights department in getting co-edition partners on board before taking a final decision to go ahead. How well informed are rights? departments about publishers abroad whose multi-cultural needs may correspond closely enough with ours to make such books financially viable? Most reference and non-fiction titles are commissioned. Do commissioning editors routinely ask themselves whether multi-cultural perspectives are relevant to this or that particular title or series and ensure that the writers, picture researchers and expert opinion they solicit are cognisant of such perspectives?

It is similarly important to break down the processes of marketing and bookselling in order to put in place strategies to get the many excellent multi-cultural books already published into the hands of the children and young people who need them, not to speak of all the books that publishers fear to embark on as they appear with our present systems to be economically unsound.



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