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Picturebooks in New Caledonia: Challenging cultural hegemony for “Une école Calédonienne”
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Picturebooks in New Caledonia: Challenging cultural hegemony for “Une école Calédonienne”

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Abstract

New Caledonia is a French overseas territory in the South Pacific with a long history of differing attitudes towards independence (Fisher, 2019). The local government aims to challenge French cultural hegemony by building a “New Caledonian School” (Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2016). That is, a school in which students are exposed to resources that reflect the realities of the country and allow for marginalised groups to become more visible in the curriculum. It is through this context that this article investigates how children’s literature, in particular picturebooks, began developing in New Caledonia. Children’s literature in New Caledonia is a relatively new phenomenon. Using Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, the paper explains the history of picturebooks in New Caledonia and their role in the curriculum. The official language of New Caledonia is French, but there are also 28 Kanak languages. Surrounded by Anglophone nations, such as Australia and New Zealand, education policies were put in place on this island to introduce English to students from primary school (Bissoonauth-Bedford, 2018). As a result, this article describes and analyses a bilingual picturebook written in French and English by Stephane Moysan (2017), entitled Yana’s Treasure: An Amazing Trip in New Caledonia. In particular, it reviews how this picturebook provides opportunities to bring to consciousness essential elements of Pacific French culture and identity both within and beyond the New Caledonian context.

Keywords

New Caledonia; cultural hegemony; education; children’s literature; Picturebook; Melanesian culture

Introduction

Evident in the construction of its curriculum programmes is New Caledonia’s complex past, present and future. New Caledonia is a territory of France located in the South Pacific between Australia and New Zealand. Its complex history and socio-political context gave birth to a unique culturally and linguistically rich hub that is also reflected throughout its literature. A New Caledonian literature that has, since the early 2000s, become critical to school teachers who are required to offer learning



opportunities that support and cater for the development of a national identity (Colombel & Fillol, 2009; Minvielle, 2018; Tauru, 2018). As explained by Hardouin (2008), education in New Caledonia is a political affair that has for many years been criticised for being irrelevant to students living in the island due to its France-centric focus. The literature of New Caledonia, just like the existence of the island itself, is often unknown to the rest of the world. The aim of this article is to examine how picturebooks can be used to challenge cultural hegemony and influence the curricula of schools in New Caledonia.

The history of New Caledonia

Indigenous people, also known as the Kanak, inhabited the island now known as New Caledonia well before the arrival of any Europeans. In 1853, under Napoleon III, France claimed the Melanesian island and began to transform it into a penal colony. New Caledonia was the last country to be colonised by the French and also the furthest away from mainland France.

With colonisation has come a range of conflicts and political debates. The population of New Caledonia has historically always been divided. This divide continues today as the country has been engaged in a dialogue for independence since the end of the second world war (David, 2019; Fisher, 2019). On one hand, the island is home to loyalists, those who wish to remain French. On the other hand, the land is said to belong to the independentists, those who seek independence from France. On the 12th December 2021, the people of New Caledonia were invited to the polls for the third time in fewer than five years to vote once again on the future of the island. On the 4th October 2020, the referendum results saw 46.74 percent voting for independence, and 53.26 percent voting against. This represented a small increase of those voting for independence from the 2018 referendum that saw a participation rate of more than 80 percent, with 43.6 percent voting for independence, and 56.4 percent voting to remain French. Irrespective of the 2021 results and the future political status of the island, dialogue will be key in moving the country forward. Dialogue and language are two powerful concepts attached to the culture and values of the people of New Caledonia, the motto of which is “*Terre de parole, terre de partage*”; a possible English translation of which would be “A land of free speech and a land for all”.

The languages of New Caledonia

There are many languages found in New Caledonia but the nation’s official and dominant lingua franca is French (Bissoonauth-Bedford, 2018). According to Jouve (n.d, p. 3) French “est lu, écrit, parlé par plus de 90% de la population” [is read, written and spoken by more than 90 percent of the population of New Caledonia]. However, New Caledonia is also home to 28 Kanak languages (Bissoonauth & Parish, 2017; Colombel-Teuira & Fillol, 2009). The most common Kanak language spoken is Drehu with 15,949 speakers but Nengone, Paicî, Xârâcùù and Ajië are also amongst the most commonly spoken languages (Académie des Langues Kanak, 2015). Prior to the 1950s, Kanak languages were actively discouraged. In fact, anyone speaking the language could have been punished for doing so (Bissoonauth & Parish, 2017). The Academy of Kanak Languages (ALK) created in 2009 has been pivotal in advocating for the recognition and promotion of native languages.

Linguistically, New Caledonia is a melting pot. For example, Wallisian, Futunian, Tahitian and Vietnamese are amongst some of the common foreign languages used by local communities. Despite New Caledonia appearing as a vibrant linguistic hub and ideally positioned to embrace the values of a plurilingual society, it is clear to anyone who spends time on this island that not all languages hold the same position. Since the island was colonised, French is the dominant language and it is considered a necessity for anyone who aspires to do well in the New Caledonian society (Colombel-Teuira & Fillol, 2009; Dotte et al., 2017; Salaün 2007). This is because French is the language of schooling, despite efforts to recognise and include Kanak languages within the education system (Fillol, 2007, 2009; Fillol

& Vernaudeau, 2004; Vandeputte, 2017). However, as Bissoonauth and Parish (2017, p. 40) explained, “French is a pluricentric language”, meaning that each location where the language is used offers a unique national variety. This leads to a linguistic insecurity amongst those who call New Caledonia home but whose mother language is not necessarily French (Colombel & Fillol, 2009). In fact, Dotte et al. (2017, p. 3) explained that “even though French or native languages may be used in daily conversation, migrants often refer to their languages practices as ‘bad,’ ‘not good enough,’ or ‘not the proper one’”. Additionally, Fillol (2007) argued that the youth of New Caledonia are often experiencing a double linguistic insecurity. She explains that this social phenomenon occurs when one is overvaluing a mother tongue that they do not speak while at the same time creating their own identity language drawn from the dominant language. In this case, it is “un français kaya” which she refers to as a type of French that is often grammatically and phonetically different to the expected standards set by organisations such as the French Language Academy in Paris.

To conclude this section on languages, it is also important to remember that New Caledonia is a French island in the Pacific but that it is surrounded by Anglophone countries (Small, 2017). In an effort to enable closer associations with the region, nowadays the vast majority of children in New Caledonian schools will have the opportunity to learn English as a foreign language. (Direction de l'Enseignement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, n.d). Most recently, in February 2021, the first Australian section of the French baccalaureate was offered to high school students in Grade 10. This is an exciting space which built upon the work of Australia’s prior Education Minister, Mr Christopher Pyne, who launched the first Australian section for New Caledonian students in middle school in 2016. English is found in the New Caledonian linguistic landscape, but it continues to be considered a foreign language, often associated with prosperous Pacific nation neighbours such as Australia and New Zealand. As a result, attitudes and perceptions towards English are different to other Pacific languages. As Bissoonauth-Bedford (2018, p. 80) explained, “English on the other hand, is considered the global language of the Pacific, and as such is more valued than Indigenous and migrant languages by the younger generations.” One may therefore raise questions of the future impact of this advocacy for English over the use of other languages found in New Caledonia. The linguistic distress that is present in the socio-political context of New Caledonia is unique, complex and intriguing. One can only wonder what the linguistic future of this Pacific Island will be as the country and its people continue to build a national identity.

Education system and politics

Nowadays, schools are seen as being responsible for providing meaningful learning opportunities that can cater for the needs and support the aspirations of all of their students, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. However, traditionally, the mass vehicle of education has been used as a strategy to ensure that the dominant values and beliefs of a society were taught to the next generation. In the context of the New Caledonian education system, special schools run by missionaries were initially put in place for Kanak children in the 1850s. According to Hardouin (2008), it is only 100 years later, in the 1950s, that French schools in New Caledonia began to authorise the enrolment of Melanesian students. It is from that point in history that Kanak leaders have asked that all schooling activities allow for a representation of not just the dominant voice. In particular, it was following the laws of Deixonne which for the first time in January 1951, authorised local languages and dialect to be taught in French schools, that Kanak leaders and other New Caledonian government representatives advocated for the inclusion of Kanak languages (Vernaudeau, 2020). Moreover, the adaptation of the school programmes to include the study of Kanak history for all students in New Caledonia was strongly advocated for (Minvielle, 2020). Overall, it is the ongoing quest for independence that has, over the years, transformed the education system in New Caledonia.

In 2000, discussions between government representatives in France and in New Caledonia began to create a school system that could be locally led with programmes that could be contextualised and better aligned with the needs and aspirations of its future generations (Minvielle, 2018). Initially, the

transfer of primary education led to the creation of the Department of Education of New Caledonia, also known as Direction de l'Enseignement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (DENC) (Mandaoué, 2003; Minvielle, 2018). Later, this transfer of powers continued to expand to also include the secondary education system.

In 2016 a transformative education project for New Caledonia was officially voted in favour of by the members of the congress. Known as the New Caledonian School—*Une Ecole Calédonienne*, this initiative was a unique opportunity to bring the young people of New Caledonia together under one shared identity (Minvielle, 2018). Its role was first and foremost to make learning relevant and accessible to all, but also to develop positive and enduring ties between all students irrespective of their cultural identities. This was the beginning of an official opportunity to challenge cultural hegemony and transform the education system so that its curriculum content was less anchored within the values of mainland France. The New Caledonian School is central to growing a 21st century New Caledonian identity.

However, the rich cultural heritage of New Caledonian students inevitably brings with it some challenges. How can a school become a school for everyone when its students bring with them so many different cultures and languages? For example, in Kanak culture, knowledge is transmitted to children orally whereas in the western world, access to knowledge is often done through reading printed books. Traditionally, stories and knowledge of Kanak people were not easily accessible and, in general, resources that were set in New Caledonia were extremely limited. This impacted on the teaching that took place in New Caledonian schools. Access to resources is key when trying to challenge the cultural hegemony of a school curriculum. Otherwise, the transmission of knowledge is bound to be confined to the dominant voice: the Western perspective (Boulard, 2017).

Gilbert Bladinieres, president of the association of editors in New Caledonia, argues, in a paper written by Tauru (2008), that the transformation of school programmes to encompass island realities requires that teachers have access to books that are rooted in the truth of their archipelagos in order to apply the directives of the educational authorities. In 2021, this continues to remain the case. Pinar (2002) has explained that curriculum is a political construct. The why, what and how behind the curriculum experiences provided for the youth of New Caledonia is not a simple neutral assemblage of knowledge. The school curriculum in New Caledonia is the result of ongoing community participation and determination to challenge the ideological hegemony, also described by Gramsci (1971) and Dawson (1982) as the invisible, dominating force that shapes social places like schools. It is the political and social interventions that were part of the history of New Caledonia that have led to a change in the everyday activities found in today's New Caledonian classroom.

Cultural hegemony

Although access to resources is a tool to challenge cultural hegemony, it is not sufficient to transform the learning that takes place in the classroom. According to Brookfield (1995),

hegemony is the use of cultural and social relations to impose or maintain power. It is the process whereby ideas, structures and actions come to be seen by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good, when in fact they are constructed and transmitted by powerful minority interests to protect the status quo that serves those interests. (p. 15)

Cultural hegemony is a form of invisible domination and can manifest itself at different levels, such as the political, economic, social and cultural terrains of society (Chisholm, 2015; Heywood, 1994; Lears, 1985; Morton, 2003; Pitsoe & Dichaba, 2013; Purvis & Hunt, 1993). In other words, it is cultural hegemony that informs the basis of one's normative bias, which then influences the beliefs and decisions of New Caledonian education authorities which are translated through the actions of educators.

As Puamau (2005) pointed out, whenever discussing resistance to curricular changes in the Pacific, one must make mention of Professor Konai Helu Thaman who in the early 2000s developed *The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative* (RPEI) with Dr Ana Taufeu'ulungaki and Dr Kabini Sanga. This initiative advocated a departure from the Eurocentric curriculum, which is often driven by an economic agenda (Thaman, 2001). For change to happen within the schooling agenda so that the curriculum taught to Pacific Nations children continues to become more relevant, educators and academics across the Pacific, not just in New Caledonia, should continue to advocate for formal education systems to be more culturally inclusive for both students and teachers living in the Island Nations (Puamau, 2005; Thaman, 1997, 2001). To counter the dominant representation of French, the teaching of marginalised French-language contexts is essential. As Chisholm asserts:

Content and pedagogy are oftentimes sources of domination that invite resistance. At the content level, there is an opportunity to examine issues from the perspective of those who historically were the silenced voices, from the perspectives of groups that were historically invisible or left out of the reckonings. (Chisholm, 2015, p. 4)

Early literature in New Caledonia

Around the world, storytelling has always been an important aspect of cultures and a means of passing knowledge to the next generation. New Caledonia is no different in that it has always been filled with stories from its first nations people. However, those stories rooted in Melanesian culture were traditionally only shared through oral means. It is only from the time of colonisation and the settlements of the penal colony that written stories coming from and about the island of New Caledonia emerged and began to travel far beyond the Pacific Ocean.

Soula (2021) identified four significant historical periods when analysing literature in New Caledonia. These periods were the transportation of writing (1853 to 1914), the blossoming of New Caledonian literature (1914 to 1970), texts influenced by political instabilities and discussions about a national identity (1970 to 1989) and everyday writing from the 1990s.

Often motivated by excitement and discomfort, the tropics, being such a different place to Europe, it is through writing that newcomers in the 1850s began what Soula (2021) refers to as the first written form of New Caledonian literature. She explained that these missionaries can be described as the first writers of New Caledonia because they were writing about their lived experiences on the island. In addition, their work was also transported out of the islands, often all the way to mainland France. It is the uniqueness highlighted in those early forms of written texts that resulted in the beginning of a fascinating literature emerging from and about New Caledonia, which Soula, at times, compares to the work of Victor Hugo. It is also said that in the 1850s stories from Kanak cultures began to be scribed and translated by Father Gagniere (Jouve, 2011). The first novel about New Caledonia is known to be *Les Robinsons Français ou la Nouvelle-Calédonie* which was written in 1856 (Jouve, 2011; Tauru, 2008).

The second period that Soula (2021) refers to is associated with the blossoming of New Caledonian literature, which she identifies as occurring from 1914 to 1970. From this point, written works continued to come from the island, but it was essentially literature written in French by authors who, with the exception of a few such as Jean Mariotti and Alain Laubreaux, were often born in France (Jouve, 2011; Soula, 2021). Poetry is also presented as a popular genre coming out of New Caledonia (Soula, 2021). However, it took a few years for picturebooks to appear. According to Tauru (2008), New Caledonia now offers a rich literary experience, but literature written for young people, in particular the picturebook, is a relatively new phenomenon.

Although not considered a picturebook, it may be seen as discourteous to not mention the well-known New Caledonian comics *La Brousse en Folie*, by author and illustrator Bernard Berger (1993), the first publication of which was released in 1983. This popular comic amongst New Caledonian

readers tells stories of everyday life of four main characters who stereotypically represent some of the cultural and ethnic groups on the island. The illustrations introduce the reader to representations of familiar environments across the New Caledonian landscape. In addition, the language used in the text mimics the unique phonology of the French spoken in New Caledonia, which is also accompanied by a range of local expressions.

Children’s literature in New Caledonia

Picturebooks for children took many more years to emerge and mature in New Caledonia. Although some picturebooks were published in the late 1980s, a search for children’s literature on the *Calédo Livre* website, a popular bookshop located in Noumea that specialises in local literature, points to the year 2000 as the popular point from which picturebooks were published. Through time, the production of children’s literature published in New Caledonia has evolved and there is now a growing presence of picturebooks that highlight the traditions, cultures, landscape and history of the island. The wide range of picturebooks currently available in New Caledonia allows for multiple interpretations of life on the island.

According to Tauru (2008), “the emergence of children’s literature in New Caledonia is the result of many years of development, built awareness and action in the field” (p. 1). Combined with the educational policy changes described in the earliest section of this essay, the sustained efforts of the association “*Lire en Calédonie*” (Reading in New Caledonia) is also known to have been a significant influence in the debut of children’s literature. In fact, members of the association established a competition in 1997 named “*Livre mon ami*” (Book my friend), which encouraged children of New Caledonia aged 9 to 13 years old to explore a range of texts and vote for their favourite children’s book. Tauru (2008) described these activities as important factors that have increased the visibility of authors, while it has also been an opportunity to reinforce the positive impact of having books that reflected life in New Caledonia.

In Table 1 below are some of the early literary texts available in New Caledonia that drew upon its local environment and social context.

Table 1. Early Literary Texts Available in New Caledonia

Date	Title	Author	Key Terms	Brief Description
1989	Yora et Firiago	Camille Ipere	Thio, Nature, Conflict,	An introduction to Kanak culture in particular the chief warrior.
1991	La petite tortue et la mouette	Merer Rosmonde & Flotat Carl	Thio, Lagoon, Animals	Friendship between a seagull, a turtle and a mermaid bringing the reader’s attention to the lagoon.
1992	Jessica et la petite abeille cristalline	Tidjine Stéphanie	Nature, Insects, Relationship	Friendship between a girl and a bee amongst the New Caledonian landscape.
1992	Origine de la monnaie traditionnelle	Rivière Françoise & Paula Boi	Hienghène, Kanak Money, Language	The trilingual (French, English and Pije) story on the origin of Kanak money.
1997	Arc-en-ciel le serpent	Multiple Authors	Thio, Languages, Animals, Legends	A collection of Kanak stories to preserve the memories of elders

				from Thio, a region on the East coast of New Caledonia.
1997	L'île et l'océan	Martine Barreau	Island, Pacific region, New Caledonia	A bilingual French and English text that tells the story of how the island of New Caledonia was born.
1998	La balade de petit Tricot	Joel Paul	Animal, Ocean, Maths, Languages	An endemic snake of New Caledonia looking for a friend and an opportunity to learn how to count to 10 in various Kanak languages.

Since the 1990s, many more children's books were published. In fact, a document issued by the *Institut de Formation des Maîtres de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Teachers' Training College of New Caledonia, n.d.), offers an extensive list of culturally authentic resources to teachers that showcases a selection of 274 illustrated children's novels and picturebooks. Over the years, the quality of the illustrations has increased dramatically and the presence of children's picturebooks in the local shops of New Caledonia remains high, despite the relatively high production costs. As Kiefer (1988) explained, picturebooks are art objects with powerful communicative powers. Children's picturebooks printed from the early 2000s are often bright in colour, come in a variety of sizes and shapes and often have hardcovers, which help to reinforce the overall quality of the book.

This boom in the children's picturebook market of New Caledonia aligns with the political movements in 2000 that saw the oversight of primary school education transferred to the New Caledonian Government. It is since this year that mainland France has stopped controlling the governance of education programs in New Caledonia, allowing local authorities to embed a range of themes across curriculum areas that are closer to the lives of its population (Hardouin, 2008). In this way, these books develop a "Pacific-mindedness" in readers. That is, they allow readers to understand the diversity and richness of the Pacific region through its land, history, people and cultures. For example, in geography students have an opportunity to learn through picturebooks about the environment of New Caledonia while in science an emphasis is placed on topics such as the lagoon and climate change. Loic Bordes's picturebooks are some examples that address topics associated with marine biodiversity and are contextualised in New Caledonia.

In addition to this increase in production of children's picturebooks, there are a growing number of texts written in both French and Melanesian languages. Since 2009, the Academy of Kanak Languages (ALK) has been a strong advocate for publications in Melanesian languages. Being able to access contextualised stories in the target language of the various cultural groups of the island is a positive step that may help address the educational gap between the indigenous and non-indigenous population of New Caledonia. Some examples, include *La Leçon du Bénitier—Tha Tro Kō a Pitru* (*The Lesson of the Clam*), (French & Drehu, 2006), a bilingual story published in 2006 in both French and Drehu that points to the need to value those who are different from us. In addition, *Le Chasseur de la Vallée—I pwi-a i-pwa muru gee na moto* (*The Hunter of the Valley*), published in 2008 in both French and Paicî offers readers an opportunity to learn about manners and cultural appropriation.

While bilingual picturebooks are both an important and symbolic result of the recognition of Kanak cultures, it does restrict access to potential readers who are not users of either French or Kanak languages. In fact, to use the words of Small (2017, p. 1), "New Caledonia is an anomaly" because it is surrounded by Anglophone islands". In addition, Jouve (n.d, p. 10) asks, "Quelle peut être la place de la Nouvelle-Calédonie francophone dans un océan anglophone?" [What could be the place of Francophone New Caledonia in an Anglophone Ocean]. For children's picturebooks to travel to the more proximal neighbours, with whom its generations share inevitable interwoven futures (Boulard,

2017), I argue that the translation of those stories into English is critical. Picturebooks about New Caledonia can be used as both a mirror and a window (Bishop, 1990). To date, the number of children's picturebooks that have been written in English within and about New Caledonia can be counted on one hand. The 1992 publication, *Origine de la Monnaie Traditionnelle* by Riviere and Boi as well as *L'île et l'Océan* from 1997 have been released in French and in English. However, these are considered older publications and the quality of the illustrations differs greatly from other books that are currently on the market. As a result, to my knowledge, the only other picturebook about New Caledonia that is available in English in the New Caledonian libraries is the Stephane Moysan's (2017) picturebook, for which he is both the narrator and illustrator.

A bilingual picturebook of New Caledonia

Moysan's (2017) book is entitled *Yana's Treasure: An Amazing Trip in New Caledonia*. The book is about a young girl named Yana who is staying over at her grandfather's home in Noumea, the capital city of New Caledonia. When she falls asleep, Yana begins to dream that she is chasing a hidden treasure. Although she will never find what she was looking for, her adventure leads the reader into the discovery of famous landmarks from all around New Caledonia, all of which are representative of the rich cultural, social and environmental heritage that is present on the island.

Moysan's picturebook was published in 2017 and is available in French and English. The English version, translated by Wendy Wong, has 42 pages and includes both written text and illustrations. Like many books from New Caledonia, it was published with the financial support of the *Province Sud* (South Province), an administrative subdivision of New Caledonia. Its author and illustrator, Stephane Moysan, born in 1974 in Douarnenez, a commune in the region of Brittany in France, moved to New Caledonia in 2015 (Ecrivainducaillou, 2018). Although the number of picturebooks have increased over the years in New Caledonia, the majority of its authors and illustrators were not born on the island. As a result, one may question the unconscious bias of the western cultural capital that is present throughout the creation process of these works of art. In fact, Mills (2016) argued that it can be challenging for white authors and illustrators to create children's books about non-white characters without reinforcing stereotypical images of the less dominant group they aim to represent.

Moysan's book includes both text and illustrations. All semi-comic illustrations are printed across two pages which provides a rich aesthetic experience and enables the reader to connect more deeply with the place here, New Caledonia. Kiefer (1988) refers to the use of double-page spreads as a strategy to further reinforce the emotional responses of the reader. Throughout the book, the text is located within the image and appears only on one side of the page, allowing its readers to focus on the brightly coloured and highly detailed aquarelles. This technique reinforces the interrelation between the words and the pictures providing opportunities for further emotive response. In 2018, the book received an award for best illustration from Bibou's competition held in Boulouparis library in New Caledonia.

The heroine, Yana, takes the reader to both the South, the North and the Loyalty Islands of New Caledonia. The reader has the opportunity to come close to local communities at the market, the fauna and flora, the Kanak people, the descendants of convicts, and animals endemic to New Caledonia, such as the cagou and the striped sea snake.

Moysan uses both texts and illustrations to teach the reader about New Caledonia. The front cover of the book, which includes the name of the author and the title of the book, introduces the reader to Yana. In addition, the front and back endpapers are the same: a map of New Caledonia but without any text. In fact, it may not be apparent to an outsider that the drawing represents New Caledonia because of the lack of written texts. That said, it is interesting to note that because of its position across two pages, the illustration of the map of New Caledonia perfectly separates the South to the North communes of the main island. This is significant because from a political and social point of view, life in the South

is indeed different to life in the North. The South is where the capital city of New Caledonia is located, whereas the North continues to be more preserved and closer to nature.

Although the illustrations of Moysan are very detailed and provide rich opportunities to discover New Caledonia, the written text is also key in increasing people's understanding of the place. Boulard (2017) identified that what was challenging at times for teachers to transform the cultural hegemony in the curriculum was not just access to resources, but sometimes it was knowing what to look for in terms of the new knowledge. Moysan's (2017) book provides educators outside of New Caledonia with some key words. The words in Table 2 below are found throughout the written text and could become the basis of further student inquiry tasks.

Table 2. **Key Words Used in Yana's Treasure: An Amazing Trip in New Caledonia**

Amedee Lighthouse	Island of Pines
Blue River Park	Kanak
Bougna	Loyalty Islands
Bourail Country Fair	Nouméa
Cagou	New Caledonia
Coconut Town Square	Pierced Rock from Bourail
Heart of Voh	Tjibaou Cultural Centre

A search on Google of all of the terms listed in the table above will lead to results directly associated with New Caledonia. Moysan's picturebook allows its readers to zoom into the Pacific region, in particular New Caledonia.

However, there is also a significant amount of hidden cultural symbolism in the illustrations of Moysan. For example, unless one is familiar with the history, culture, environment and people of New Caledonia, the following might be missed (Table 3).

Table 3. **Significant Cultural Symbolism in Yana's Treasure: An Amazing Trip in New Caledonia**

The map of New Caledonia	The sea snake also known as tricot rayé
The colonial and heritage houses	The boat " <i>la pirogue</i> "
The cruise ships	The baguettes
The cathedral	The custom " <i>la coutume</i> "
The blue roof representing the market	The yams
The market of Noumea	The hen rock
The music kiosk	Bay of Prony
The fauna and flora	The turtles in Bourail

The illustrations that capture the above terms are not specifically described through written texts, but they carry with them meanings about the place and its people. For example, at no point in the book does Moysan raise the fact that New Caledonia was colonised by Europeans; however, he offers a detailed representation of a captain and its sailors in a bay that has many humpback whales. This place is well known by locals in New Caledonia because of the village that remains from the time of the convicts in the 1890s. On a side note, the written text that accompanies this particular illustration of the

white captain with his ship, most likely representing James Cook or Jean-Joseph de Brun, can be described as slightly pretentious in comparison to the other character that helps Yana throughout the book. The words of the captain were “For a child it’s sometimes hard to unravel a mystery” (p. 28). The choice of language may have been purposefully selected to denote a tone of presumptuous attitudes from European settlers towards the indigenous people of New Caledonia.

Moreover, traditionally, in Kanak culture, elders, often grandparents, are known for sharing stories inside the “case”, which is the traditional Kanak hut. Similarly, in this book, the story also begins inside the home of Yana’s grandfather in her bedroom. Although the room appears at first sight as being modest, she sleeps on a mattress that is placed on a traditional Melanesian mat. Moysan did not portray Yana as a girl living in a remote village. This representation offers a modern and culturally authentic representation of young people in New Caledonia, very few of whom are living in huts.

Although the cultural background of Yana herself is not specified in the text, the morphology of her name reminds one of the first two syllables in the word “Kanak”: “Ka-na”-“Ya-na”. That said, the name Yana is also a popular name in Brittany (France), which is originally where Moysan, the author, comes from. It is worth noting Yana’s treasure mirrors a 2012 publication by Moysan that is set in Brittany, with the main character entitled Yannette. This is a reminder that Yana is a different character to Yannette but perhaps the similar sounding names is used to point to Moysan’s past and remind us that, despite him writing about Yana’s adventure, he first comes from another place (France). By using two very similar names, he acknowledges where he comes from but also that this place is a new one, therefore requires a new name. Additionally, by creating a second character, with darker coloured skin, Moysan allows children from minority groups to see themselves in a positive way. In New Caledonia over 40 percent of the population is of Melanesian descent. Yana is the heroine of this story even though it would have been possible to imagine Yannette, a blonde and white skin character, going on an adventure to New Caledonia. This is indeed a common feature of children’s picturebooks where the same character is put into a different context and lives new adventures.

The translated version also loses some of the meaning in the illustrations. For example, when Yana is travelling in the Island of Pines, some of the pine trees are represented through the shapes of crispy baguettes. In French, the word pine is *pin* which phonologically is the same as the morpheme *pain* meaning bread in English. Although this connection between the illustration and the French language works with those homophones, it is lost in English and therefore the reader may struggle to understand the representation.

In being used to bringing to consciousness a place that is often unknown, while also challenging the dominant cultural hegemony, any picturebook, or book for that matter, relies heavily on the approach of the educational practitioner. *Yana’s Treasure* is a tool that, in the right hands, provides some opportunities to develop critical consciousness that shifts the mind of the reader towards the Pacific French part of the world. The perspectives available from the story and illustrations represent a pluralistic view of New Caledonia. It is possible to argue that, similarly to the work of many western artists, Moysan’s picturebook can be described as reinforcing the stereotypical imageries of the Pacific, most notably by portraying Kanak people living happily in villages. Overall, there are strong and positive representations of Kanak culture throughout the book, but teachers will need to guide students’ conversations. However, while an experienced educator from New Caledonia who holds a reasonable understanding of the culture and geography of the country would be able to identify the majority of the cultural symbolism, this would be more difficult for any educator without this background knowledge.

As a teaching resource *Yana’s Treasure* has the potential to fulfil much of the ambition of the *Ecole Calédonienne*. It contrasts with the Eurocentric texts that dominated classrooms prior to the 1990s. Through this picturebook, young New Caledonian readers are given the opportunity to feel pride in the rich cultural diversity, remarkable biodiversity and geographic landmarks of their island. The sense of belonging Yana experiences throughout the book provides an optimistic view of New Caledonia’s future, a land where everyone is welcome and can belong.

More widely, *Yana's Treasure* is an effective teaching tool for French teachers in Anglophone countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, who seek to challenge the dominant France-centric hegemony. While some of the nuance in the cultural symbolism may be lost, the representation of New Caledonia and its people is still very relatable to the island as it is today.

Conclusion

There are many children's picturebooks that can offer both a mirror and a window into the relatively unknown cultures and languages of New Caledonia. In particular, the extensive range of picturebooks from New Caledonia provides an opportunity to develop students' Pacific-mindedness. Although most picturebooks published in New Caledonia are written in either French or Kanak languages, it is not impossible to imagine a future in which more, like Moysan's (2017) picturebook, will be translated into English.

French is described as the language of "integration" for those living in New Caledonia. However, many traditional French texts only reinforce cultural hegemony. As the country of New Caledonia continues to move forwards into an uncertain political status, the language and cultures of the islands have increasingly been captured through picturebooks.

Picturebooks about New Caledonia that are written in English offer local students an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about familiar topics in a foreign language, which in turn can enhance their Pacific-mindedness. It is also worth noting that for children's literature to be integrated and be known within the Pacific region, translation into English would be valuable. For example, in countries like Australia, where French is one of the top five most studied languages in schools, picturebooks from New Caledonia offer targeted resources for teachers who wish to embed Pacific perspectives within their curriculum.

Inspiring teachers to change their practice to include traditionally less visible cultures is possible, but it is also a challenge. According to Flesicher (2009), creating a culture of change that leads to counter-hegemonic teaching is possible through the use of positive and collaborative powers that offer one the chance to imagine the familiar in unfamiliar ways. Picturebooks provide such opportunities. In the context of developing a counter-hegemonic pedagogy as part of the New Caledonian school, one can follow Chisholm's (2015) recommendation that educators make use of critical pedagogy through a participatory approach. Teachers must be encouraged to think critically about what is currently being taught and how it could be challenged. Future research to determine teachers' attitudes towards New Caledonia picturebooks would add to this field of knowledge. In the meantime, teachers in New Caledonia who strive towards delivering a curriculum for a New Caledonian school will be ideally placed to contribute to a generational movement which will grow emancipated youth who can act as agents of change upon the hegemonic culture.

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