‘BEING AUTHENTIC’: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A MINORITISED CHILDREN’S WRITER?

NOTES FROM OUR OPEN CONVERSATION ON 24/05/26

About Open Conversations

Open Conversations are facilitated online group discussions which any children's writer of colour is welcome to join. They usually arise from a suggestion by a Megaphone Community member and are focused on topics of special interest or relevance to the community.

Topics we discussed included

- When have I felt I CAN be authentic as a children’s writer? Have there been positive experiences?
- Is the word authentic even helpful? Is there a word I prefer?
- When have I felt I was NOT able to be authentic as a children’s writer? How did that situation come about?
- Am I more confident to be authentic as a children’s writer in some aspects of my identity (ethnicity, class, gender, etc.) than in others?
- Have aspects of my identity ever felt ‘flattened’ or erased for publishing purposes?
- Do I have fears about being my whole self in as a published author? What are they?
- Is there a pressure to represent or protect others and does that feel as if it compromises creativity sometimes?
- We hoped to end on a constructive note by coming up with some strategies so we also asked: based on our experiences and these discussions, what suggestions and recommendations would we like to make to

  1) other minoritised writers?

  2) publishing?

Defining the problem

- We feel that we are expected to meet an authenticity threshold by publishers AND by our community groups. Worries about feeling criticised from publishing, own community and if diaspora from origin country too.
- The word ‘policing’ was used to describe how publishers now (since around 2020) see a person from an ethnic minority as *only* able to write about that ethnicity – while we have many other stories to tell, and many of us are anyway from mixed and complex heritages.
- There was a sea-change in 2017-2020 in terms of awareness, but the people in charge remain the same – have they had training, learning? Does it really matter to them beyond a trend?
- We experience friction between what the publishing world sees as authenticity and our reality. When they ask for authentic they are asking for palatable versions of our experience, not honesty.



Key comment: Who can tell you what is authentic? Who actually has that authority other than yourself?

Coming up with solutions

Recommendations to other minoritised writers:

- Remember that we are not just one story. We are diverse within our diversity. We shouldn’t feel boxed in by our culture.
- Write what you love and want to write. You will be pulled many ways but you are the only person who can decide what to write.
- Have confidence. You have the right to write anything. We can’t control how others see us, or the publishing world’s expectations, we can only control our characters and be authentic to our characters.
- Lock into communities. Make connections. Don’t suffer in silence: talk to others about what you are experiencing.
- Advocate for your book, be confident in your story.

Recommendations for publishers:

- Children are open-minded and ready for real stories and diversity. There are more readers than you think there are.
- Diversify your workforce and educate your existing workforce in order to

reach fresh audiences.

- Think globally in terms of audience.
- Realise your writers are an asset, not something to fear.
- Talk to your authors. You are safe to ask them questions. Are they not sending you certain books they have written because they assume they are pigeon holed?
- Open up your ideas of what you think you want from authors.
  We write good books so back us and our books with marketing and promotion.



Key comment: Our value as representing what an author can look like, or what a story can contain is not our ONLY value as a writer.