

The Challenges in Choosing Themes for FOSR

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When FOSR began using a thematic approach, we thought it would be easy. After all, when Janet, Ann and I sat down, we were surrounded by books that had just been published, and we were aware of the contemporary concerns educators and parents were facing. Surely it would be easy to combine those two issues with interesting publications. In the end, we've found it isn't that simple.

One of the reasons is that some of the topics we are most interested in don't have as many books as we would like when we determine what we will pursue. Let's take this issue as an example. Our hope was to look at how women and the contemporary STEM focus are changing education and society. We thought that authors and publishers might release many books about the accomplishments of professional women in science, technology, engineering and math. We wanted to show that women were instrumental in change. And we wanted nonfiction books for this issue, though we would have settled for a fictional story of a woman who used her engineering strategies to solve a problem within society. What we found were a few historical presentations of women—mostly in fields more closely aligned with the social sciences—and their successes despite the contemporary attitudes of their times. It wasn't the picture we had hoped to present. As Kelli M. Sellers aptly points out in her review of *Look Up! Henrietta Leavitt, Pioneering Woman Astronomer*, "Henrietta remains an anomaly at the end. Men like Copernicus and Galileo were absolutely central figures, but in this story of a pioneering woman astronomer, the message cannot only be one of an uncharacteristic woman. Rather, children's stories about women in STEM should allow girls the opportunity to imagine themselves in such positions."

Purdue University's Curriculum and Instruction department chair Phil VanFossen came upon us as we were discussing this issue, and when we told him our problems in finding appropriate literature, he asked, "Aren't there books about Madame Curie or Sally Ride?" No, we explained, there was nothing new when we selected the books. We didn't point out that both women were dead, or that we had hoped to show contemporary readers stories of women currently doing exciting things in the scientific world.

Now, as I look at the most recent children's and young adult literature listed on amazon.com, I can find new biographies of Amelia Earhart, Rachel Carson, and Sally Ride. Still, as earth-shaking as these women have been to U.S. history, I would have rather found something about some living STEM women. Why are there no biographies of people like Jacqueline K. Barton, Marla Spivak, and Carolyn W. Greider? Perhaps issues like this pinpoint larger problems in our contemporary society.

What might our readers learn if they looked at the books reviewed? They might discover what we have discovered: there is little for our children and adolescents that informs them about current professional STEM women and their work. A second concern for us is that you might never consider our discovery of what is missing. You might pick up this issue and think, "Oh, they're doing an issue that deals with women who helped shape society's attitudes, understandings, and practices in the past." You would never know that we were forced to turn from the present to the past.

Sometimes, though, we are surrounded by more books than we need. Then the problem becomes one of finding reviewers. Often we find that more difficult than we think it will be with the topic we have selected. One of our followers suggested recently that we need to announce our themes for a year's publication so that followers like you can volunteer to review books. With that in mind, we want to alert you to next year's topics.

Our spring issue is being edited by Editorial Board member Michelle H. Martin. She has already picked the books and reviewers, so she is in good shape. We wanted you to know that her topic is "Diversity Around the Corner and Around the World." The topics for the next two issues are "Contemporary Young Role Models" and "World of Politics." We're just now selecting the books, and we would welcome your help, both in finding publications released at the end of 2014 or that will be published in 2015, and in finding reviewers. Won't you give us your advice? We'd love to hear from you! Just send an email note to Ann Koci, (akoci@purdue.edu) and we'll share it in our next editorial meeting.