

MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE U.S. SINCE THE 1960s

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Abstract

Multicultural children's literature benefits children from minority cultures because it enables them to relate to characters and encourages them to value reading. This research project concentrates on the history of multicultural children's literature in the United States, specifically focusing on how African American and Hispanic Latinx portrayals in American picture books have evolved since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. It examines how poor-quality literature perpetuates stereotypes whereas quality literature is culturally authentic. The project discusses modern-day guidelines of quality multicultural children's literature and explores the meaning of cultural authenticity. It draws on peer reviewed articles, content analyses of children's literature, personal interviews, books, statistics from the United States Census Bureau and the Cooperative Children's Book Center, and two picture books that exemplify multiculturalism. The statistics discussed in the project demonstrate that the amount of available multicultural children's literature in the United States does not adequately reflect the minority population. The research project argues that since multicultural children's literature validates minority children's experiences and helps children adjust to living in a culturally diverse nation, it needs to have a stronger presence in the literary world of the United States.

Keywords: multicultural children's literature, African American, Hispanic, Latinx, Civil Rights Movement, United States, minority population

Introduction

The lessons children learn influence the people they become when they grow up. Unfortunately for children from minority cultures, the lesson they learn is their experiences and stories have no place in mainstream children's literature. The United States of America is becoming increasingly diverse and children are growing up in a nation with a population unlike those of previous generations. In order for children to prepare to live in a country that radiates diversity, they must gain exposure to different cultures. Additionally, children from diverse cultural backgrounds need to know their experiences matter and their culture is valuable.

Literature is one of the main tools society uses to educate children; therefore, it is the ideal method of presenting accurate representations of cultures. Multicultural children's literature allows children to learn about and relate to people from their culture as well as those from different cultures. Children from minority cultures who live in the United States often experience dissonance between their heritage and their surroundings. Multicultural literature is one way these students can make connections between their home lives and their lives at school (Barry, 1998, p. 632). Through literature, children can learn about themselves and others as well as learn to balance the various cultures that define their identities.

This research project will look at the history of multicultural children's literature beginning in the midst of the Civil Rights movement in the United States in the 1960s. For the purposes of this project, the two focus cultures are African American and Hispanic Latinx. Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish and Latinx refers to people who are from Latin America. This research project will look at literature for Spanish-speaking people from Latin America so both the terms Hispanic and Latinx are used. This project uses United States census data, children's literature statistics, historical research, and literature content analyses and

reviews to argue that while strides have been made to advance quality multicultural children's literature, work still needs to be done to ensure all children have access to stories that mirror their own. It will also discuss how the presence of multiculturalism in children's literature has a positive impact on children because it validates their culture and introduces them to other cultures. The presence of multiculturalism in children's literature in the United States has increased in regards to quality and availability; however, the diversity in literature does not reflect the diversity of the national population.

Multicultural children's literature establishes cultural diversity in various ways. For instance, children's books that portray diverse cultures have characters from a minority cultural backgrounds. The differences between cultures may be expressed through characters' skin color, clothes, homes, traditions, native languages, and the activities they enjoy. Despite the methods authors use to address the differences between their characters' cultures, one essential characteristic of multicultural children's literature is authenticity. Children's literature should not promote stereotypes which expose children to harmful representations of their own culture as well as cause them to have misconceptions of other cultures. Stereotypes, whether positive or negative, hinder multicultural competence. In order for children to understand the importance of their cultural experiences and see accurate portrayals of different cultures, the information and situations they see in the pages of books must be authentic. Therefore, this research only refers to multicultural children's literature that presents authentic representations of African American and Hispanic Latinx cultures.

National Demographics and Literature Statistics

Multicultural children's literature gives children from minority cultures an opportunity to read about characters that resemble them and it introduces children to diverse cultures. It

encourages them to embrace and value themselves as well as those who are different than them. According to Martinez and Nash (1990), "Literature about their own experiences helps students identify with written language as a place where they can learn about themselves" (p. 599). The presence of multiculturalism in children's literature also inspires children to learn about various cultures and form relationships with people from those cultures. Children need to be introduced to diverse cultures at a young age because the United States has continually seen growth in minority populations. Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (2011) stated the results of the 2000 and 2010 censuses show an increase in the minority population in all fifty states (p. 19). Additionally, Colby and Ortman (2015) predicted the population of the United States will continue to become increasingly diverse (pp. 2-13). Children need to prepare to interact with people from different cultures because the minority population of the United States is expected to continue to grow. Since an increasing number of children are from minority cultures, literature should reflect this growth. Unfortunately, despite the strong presence of minority cultures in the country, schools tend to hold fast to literary canons, or lists of critic, educator, and parent endorsed literature, that "reflect the experiences, values, perspectives, knowledge, and interpretations of Whites, particularly Anglo-Saxons" (Harris, 1990, p. 540).

The growth in the Hispanic population accounted for over half of the growth of the total population from 2000 to 2010 (Humes et al., 2011, p. 3). According to Humes et al., "The only major race group to experience a decrease in its proportion of the total population was the White alone population" (p. 5). From 2000 to 2010, the minority population experienced a growth of twenty-nine percent (p. 17). Around one-tenth of all counties in the United States had a minority-majority population (p. 19). Between 2000 and 2010, the non-Hispanic White alone population decreased in fifteen states (p. 19). The data the United States Census Bureau collected in 2010

confirms the country is becoming increasingly diverse; therefore, the need for multicultural children's literature is becoming increasingly undeniable.

Colby and Ortman predicted what the United States population will look like in the coming decades. They based their predictions on historical trends, the 2010 Census, and the 2014 National Projections (Colby & Ortman, 2015, pp. 1-2 and 13). The foreign-born population is projected to increase by twenty percent between 2010 and 2020 alone (p. 2). The population of people who identify with more than one race is predicted to grow faster than any other group and triple in size in less than fifty years (p. 9). The Hispanic population is anticipated to comprise twenty-nine percent of the United States by the year 2060 (p. 9). The child population appears to be increasing in diversity at a faster rate than the total population (pp. 10-11). Sixty-four percent of children, compared to only fifty-six percent of the total population, are expected to be part of minority groups by 2060 (pp. 10-11). In regard to the total population, Colby and Ortman also predicted "by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group...and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born" (p. 1). However, the child population of the United States will likely shift to a minority-majority in 2020 (p. 13). Colby and Ortman's predictions for the nation's future demographics illustrate its increasing diversity, which makes multicultural children's literature an essential tool for American society.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison releases statistics on children's books about people from minority cultures and are written and/or illustrated by minorities. The CCBC began to record the books written or illustrated by African Americans it received yearly (CCBC, 2018, para. 1). In 1985, out of about 2,500 children books published that year, only eighteen were the work of African Americans

(CCBC, 2018, para. 1; Horning, 2009, p. 13). Between 1985 and 1987, the number of books published by African Americans nearly doubled (Horning, 2009, p. 13). The number more than doubled from 1987 to 1991 (p. 13). In 1994, the CCBC also began documenting the numbers of books created by Latinxs among other minority groups (CCBC, 2018, para. 3). During that same year, the CCBC also began tracking the number of books written about minority cultures, but not necessarily created by members of those cultures (para. 3). African American authors published one hundred books in 1995 and, in the years since, African Americans publish an average of about eighty-five books per year (Horning, 2009, p. 13). In 2015, out of the 3,200 books the CCBC received, Africans/African Americans created one hundred six books and 244 were about Africans/African Americans (CCBC, 2018, n.p.). Additionally, Latinxs created fifty-six books and seventy-nine books were about Latinxs (n.p.). In 2017, out of the 3,500 books the CCBC received, Africans/African Americans created one hundred sixteen and three hundred nineteen were about Africans/African Americans (n.p.). Latinxs created one hundred eight books and two hundred five were about Latinxs (n.p.). The number of books written or illustrated by people of color has increased since the mid-1980s; however, it has plateaued and the amount never exceeds five percent of the total number of published children's books (Horning, 2009, p. 14).

The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States further ignited the conversation about racism and the push for equality across racial and cultural lines. The activism of African Americans opened the door for their inclusion in children's literature and shed light on all minorities in the nation. During a highpoint of the Civil Rights Movement, inner city schools received money to purchase children's books about minorities, which led to an increase in multicultural children's literature (Martinez & Nash, 1990, p. 600). However, not all of the

literature was free of stereotypes. The history of multicultural children's literature since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s is scattered with triumphs and challenges in the effort to give minority cultures a strong presence in the pages of books across the United States.

According to Tunnell and Jacobs (2013), the grants the government gave to school libraries helped children's literature publishing become a large industry in the United States in the 1960s (p. 83). The 1960s was a decade of revolutionary changes in the United States as controversial topics such as divorce, abuse, death, and alcoholism found their way into children's literature (p. 83). At the time, quality children's books written by and about minorities were scarce (p. 83). Tunnell and Jacobs claimed the first picture book to have an African American protagonist void of negative stereotypes was *The Snowy Day* written by Ezra Jack Keats in 1962 (p. 83). To encourage publication of culturally diverse children's books, two awards emerged in the 1960s: the Mildred L. Batchelder Award for international books translated into English and the Coretta Scott King Award for African American authors and illustrators (p. 83).

Unfortunately, with this new market for multicultural literature, publishers began to release texts that emphasized diversity, but also perpetuated stereotypes (Banfield, 1998, para. 4).

In 1965, the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) formed as a byproduct of the Civil Rights Movement (Banfield, 1998, para. 5). Those who noticed the ill-treatment of African Americans in children's literature understood the necessity of the CIBC (para. 3). The CIBC fights for all minority groups in addition to African Americans. The organization created the Bulletin of Interracial Books for Children in order to publish information regarding children's literature about minorities (para. 5). In 1969, the CIBC created an annual writers' contest to encourage minority writers to submit their work for publication (para. 7). Among the winners was African American writer Mildred D. Taylor, who went on to write *Roll of Thunder*,

Hear My Cry in 1976 (para. 7). The CIBC also created the Racism and Sexism Resource Center so educators have access to various resources to learn how to identify and counteract racism and sexism in literature (para. 8). The organization is credited with being the first to construct guidelines for evaluating the authenticity of children's books (Gilton, 2012, p. 45).

Despite its success, the CIBC's creation and line of work has its critics. Burress argued eliminating books with racist and/or sexist stereotypes is censorship (Moore & Burress, 1981, p. 16). He emphasized that while the CIBC's insistence on better literature is constructive, its push for a definitive definition of quality literature and its negative response to past literature is concerning (p. 19). The criticism aimed towards the CIBC does not negate the necessity of ensuring children have access to quality multicultural literature free of stereotypes.

In the 1970s, school libraries received less federal funding and bookstores became the main market for children's literature (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2013, p. 84). The phrase "multicultural education" appeared in writing in 1972 (Sleeter, 2018, p. 5). Author Geneva Gay classified the 1970s as the ideal time in which multicultural education expanded both quantitatively and qualitatively (as cited in Sleeter, 2018, p. 7). Sleeter revealed there was a large push during the decade to teach educators, who were at the time and remain today predominately White, the particulars of multicultural education (p. 7).

From the 1980s onward, various multicultural publishers, distributors, institutions, organizations, journals, and resources emerged (Gilton, 2012, p. 45). While some mainstream companies published and released multicultural works, a few members of minority cultures founded publishing and distribution companies to circulate their work (p. 46). Unfortunately, mainstream bookstores do not sell the majority of this literature (p. 46). The shortage of multicultural children's literature in bookstores is reminiscent of when libraries used to keep

their few copies of African American children's literature on remote bookshelves (Muse, 1975, p. 13). Any increase of publication of diverse children's literature does not amount to much when bookstores and libraries do not make it available to children.

The National Association for Multicultural Education came onto the scene in 1990 and other organizations also developed (Sleeter, 2018, p. 7). The 1990s were a time when "Many schools seemed to be reaching their students of color better, partially as a result of these efforts, as evidenced by jumps in scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress for African American and Latino students" (p. 7). However, multicultural education needs further development because, as Sleeter argued, the modern-day movement of neoliberal multicultural education adds diversity to teacher evaluation systems as an afterthought instead of using it as a foundation (p. 11). She revealed such systems are "redefining multicultural education to mean adapting *how* one teaches, but not necessarily *what* one teaches or for *what purposes*" (p. 11). Multiculturalism is deeper than simply adapting how to teach mainstream White American content and literature to minority students. Using multicultural literature as a basis for curriculum is the approach that values diversity and is beneficial to all students.

Recent decades have not only seen an increase in organizations that advocate for diverse children's literature, but also the creation of a new form of advocacy in the form of the internet. The internet allows people to advocate for diversity in children's literature through blogs and social media. According to Campbell (2017), the first blog that focused on diversity in children's literature emerged in February 2005 and others followed shortly thereafter (p. 10). In 2014, a Twitter movement known as #WeNeedDiverseBooks further highlighted the discussion of diversity in children's literature (p. 10). In 2015, the book *Fine Dessert: Four Centuries, Four Families, One Delicious Treat* by Emily Jenkins was published and heavy criticism followed

because the book portrayed a smiling slave (p. 10). The conversation zoned in on the portrayal of slavery in children's literature as a whole as well as cultural insider versus cultural outsider authorship (p. 10). After the internet uproar, Jenkins apologized for her racially insensitive book, but the book's illustrator, Sophie Blackall, did not apologize (p. 10). Scholastic published another book, *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* by Ramin Ganeshram, in January 2016 which also depicted cheerful slaves (p. 10). The internet exploded with criticism for the book (pp. 10-11). Leslie MacFadyen of Ferguson Response Network created #slaverywithasmile on Twitter in response (pp. 10-11). Thousands of people signed a petition protesting the book, and articles discussed the book's racial insensitivity (p. 11). On January 17, 2016, after less than a month of being in print, Scholastic stopped distributing the book as a result of the outcry (p. 11). Children's literature today is still susceptible to misrepresentations and stereotypes of diverse cultures. However, the internet provides a platform to raise awareness for quality literature and demand action when racial insensitivity finds its way into children's books.

Cultural Authenticity

An essential component of multicultural children's literature is cultural authenticity. Cultural authenticity does not have a clear-cut definition, but is easily recognizable for people who are reading books about their own culture. For the purposes of a 2014 study completed by Yoo-Lee, Fowler, Adkins, Kim, and Davis, cultural authenticity referred to books that lack stereotypes and contain values and details consistent with the culture (p. 326). The study found the majority of settings in literature about African Americans and Hispanic Americans were urban (p. 332). The researchers found most of the fifteen books about African Americans authentically portrayed of the culture, but a few also contained negative stereotypes (pp. 332-333). Some of the negative features included improper grammar, poverty, broken homes, and

criminal activity (Table 3). The authentic components included perseverance, value of education, different skin tones, and racism (Table 3). The majority of the fifteen books about Hispanic Americans were culturally authentic with a few negative components (p. 333). A few of the negative features included poverty, broken families, and extended family living together (Table 3). The authentic elements included the proper use of Spanish and a large, loving family (Table 3). Cultural authenticity evolves as cultures evolve; a book considered culturally authentic today might not be in twenty-five years (p. 342). Culturally authentic books are essential because they “are more engaging for children from the culture portrayed and serve as a vital source of intercultural understanding” (p. 343).

A significant challenge educators, librarians, and parent/guardians face when selecting multicultural literature is confirming the cultural authenticity of a book. Summer Edward developed ten guidelines for selecting multicultural children's literature. The first guideline is the book does not contain stereotypes, offensive language, or negative attitudes (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 14). The presence of such negative components in books are counterproductive. Edward's second guideline is the author is a cultural insider (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 14). When authors are part of the culture they write about, they have an intimate understanding of the cultural traditions and values, which shows in the quality of their writing. The same can be said for illustrators who are cultural insiders. Bishop argued that while outsiders may be able to write accurate books about a cultural group besides their own, the members of that group will most likely not take ownership of the books (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 635). Edward also stated the components of the story must be historically accurate (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 14). Historical inaccuracies lead to misconceptions about the struggles and triumphs of a culture. As with all quality literature, the book should be an example of skilled storytelling (as cited in

Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 14). Another guideline is the book does not imply there is one cause or simple solution to the culture's socio-historical problems (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 14). Instead, the focus should be on how characters face these challenges and move forward. Edward also argued a critical component of multicultural literature is it contains words and expressions from the culture (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 15). The language the author uses should be true to the culture in order to avoid misrepresentations. Edward maintained a multicultural children's book should clearly state the characters' cultural heritages (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 15). In Hispanic and Latinx literature, it is beneficial to specify the characters' culture because they could be from any number of Spanish-speaking and/or Latin American cultures. The eighth guideline Edward created is the book avoids presenting cultures or groups as rivals (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 15). When authors pit different cultures or groups against each other, they typecast one group as heroes and the other as villains. Additionally, Edward notes that multicultural literature should accurately echo the culture's fundamental values (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 15). The final guideline on Edward's list is the book recognizes the range of experiences among members of the culture (as cited in Kiefer & Tyson, 2014, p. 15). People within a cultural group have different experiences depending on where they live and what situations they face. It is important to keep these guidelines in mind when examining literature because not all multicultural children's books are culturally authentic.

African American Children's Literature

During the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, literature was not geared toward African American readers and, as a result, it often portrayed African Americans as laughably inferior characters (Bishop, 2012, p. 6). Despite this trend, between 1945 and 1965 authors such

as Shirley Graham, Dorothy Sterling, Ann Petry, and Emma Gelders Sterne, wrote biographies for children to teach them to stand up against injustice (Mickenberg, 2002, p. 66, 86). The biographies about significant African Americans throughout history, including the Civil Rights Movement, contributed to the multicultural shift in children's literature in the late 1960s and early 1970s (p. 88). In 1965, an influential article called "The All-White World of Children's Books" by Nancy Larrick brought the lack of African American presence in children's literature to light. Larrick (1965) surveyed the 5,206 children's trade books published between 1962 and 1964 and found only 349, an average of 6.7 percent, included African American characters (pp.63-64). Of those books, only 0.8 percent were about contemporary African Americans (p. 64). During what Harris referred to as African American children's literature's "shift to assimilation" from 1940 to 1965, authors such as Arna Bontemps, Jesse Jackson, and Lorenzo Graham wrote literature about African American experiences for readers of any race (Harris, 1990, pp. 548-549). White publishers published these books, experienced increased sales, and expanded readership for African-American-authored children's literature (Larrick, 1965, p. 549). From the 1970s to the early 1990s, books published by or about African Americans hovered around two hundred books per year (Harris, 1990, p. 552). The nation was becoming increasingly diverse while children's literature continued to lag behind the times.

In one of her previous works from 1982, Bishop (2012) coined terms for three types of children's books about African Americans: social conscience, melting pot, and culturally conscience books (p. 7). She referred to books about African Americans published mostly between 1965 and 1970 as social conscience books (p. 7). Social conscience books primarily focus on racially-charged conflicts between Whites and African Americans, which reflects the era they were written in (p. 7). African American characters appeared exotic and were subject to

stereotypes transferred from authors' ignorant tendencies in past literature (p. 7). In these stories, the White characters were the sole messengers of tolerance and empathy for their African American peers (p. 7). McNair (2003) argued social conscience books typically portray African Americans as passive bystanders and White characters as active advocates of racial equality (p. 28). Although children must learn the history of racism, African American readers deserve relatable, contemporary characters as well as stories where White characters are not champions of equality who defend passive African American characters. Some social conscience books demonstrate a shallow understanding of racism because their stories revolve around issues of outright hatred instead of acknowledging systematic privileges Whites enjoy (p. 31).

The main focus of melting pot books is to include African American characters in mainstream children's literature (McNair, 2003, p. 7). In these books, most of which are picture books, cultural differences are only skin deep and all other differences are ignored (Bishop, 2012, p. 7). The positive effect of melting pot books is they emphasize similarities between African American and White characters; however, they neglect to represent African American culture (p. 7).

Culturally conscience books were published after 1965 and authentically represent African American experiences in addition to the universal human experience (Bishop, 2012, p. 7). According to Bishop, "These books are set in Black cultural environments, have Black major characters, are told from the perspective of those characters, and include some textual means of identifying characters as Black, such as physical descriptions or distinctive cultural markers." Books in this category accurately portray African American vernacular English and contain illustrations that depict variations in the African American characters' physical appearances (Harris, 1990, p. 551). Despite various good qualities, culturally conscience books are not

flawless because some authors fail to capture African American characters' perspectives within their cultural context (Bishop, 2012, p. 7).

One way authors fail to capture African Americans' perspectives within their cultural context is through their depiction of racism. In their examination of seven children's books about racism and discrimination, Willis-Rivera and Meeker (2002) found the books can only be read from the perspective of whiteness and are worded in such a way that implies the audience is White (pp. 272, 276). In other words, the books look at diversity through the lens of whiteness as opposed to through the eyes of the people from that culture. As a result, the books portray whiteness as the American standard for normal and all other races and cultures as exotic (pp. 275-276). Some books even go so far as to portray White people as victims of racism at the hands of people of color (pp. 272-273). In these books, any racist remarks or acts the White characters say and do are in response to the hurtful words or actions of the characters of color (p. 273). Another tendency of certain books is to portray people of color as objects of White characters' jealousy, either because of their "exotic" appearance or a desirable aspect of their culture, such as the food they eat (pp. 273-275). In these situations, books imply if White characters covet characters of color, there can be no ill will or mistreatment in the relationship (p. 274). In each of these situations, White readers feel proud of themselves for reading multicultural literature without acknowledging their explicit and/or implicit participation in racism (p. 277).

Modern African American children's literature did not begin to shift into what it is today until the late 1960s (Bishop, 2012, p. 9). The literature emerged as a result of the lack of African American presence in literature and became a way to combat previous literary stereotypes (p. 10). The types of literature about African Americans show the differing opinions of what constitutes quality multicultural literature. African American children benefit from having

literature they can relate to because if they do not see themselves or their culture in the stories they read, they are not likely to value reading or education (Harris, 1990, p. 552).

Example of Quality African American Children's Literature

Rachel Owens, a graduate student and future educator in Tennessee, is of mixed race: her father is African American and her mother is White (R. Owens, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Throughout her childhood, it was difficult to find children's literature representative of her culture because, while she could relate to African American and White characters, she could not find books about children of mixed races (R. Owens, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Since she could not find books that reflected her mixed race, she was not exposed to stereotypes regarding her specific culture; however, she could not find characters who shared her experiences. In regards to the authorship of multicultural children's literature, Owens believes authors do not necessarily have to be cultural insiders as long as they do extensive research and analyze their writing to ensure accuracy (R. Owens, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Moving forward, she would like to see more multicultural children's literature so children of underrepresented cultures can "feel connected and appreciated" and classrooms can "help develop empathy and understanding amongst all students" (R. Owens, personal communication, October 29, 2018).

One way to illustrate a mixture of races and diversity within African American culture Owens talked about is through characters' skins tones. *Crown: An Ode to The Fresh Cut*, written by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James, demonstrates diversity in this way. The book has won numerous awards such as: Newbery Honor Book, Caldecott Honor Book, Coretta Scott King Award Author and Illustrator Honor Book, Ezra Jack Keats New Author Award Book, Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Honor Book, and a Society of Illustrators Gold Medal

Book. The story follows a young African American boy as he goes to his barber to get a haircut. The boy exudes self-confidence and pride in his African American culture. As the boy anticipates the confidence his fresh haircut will bring him, Barnes (2017) wrote “You might just smash that geography exam tomorrow and rearrange the entire principal’s honor roll” (n.p.) and “They’re going to have to wear shades when they look up to catch your shine” (n.p.). The boy also enjoys the barber shop’s atmosphere. While he looks around at the other customers, the narrator says “There’s a dude to the left of you with a faux-hawk, deep part, skin fade, He looks presidential” (n.p.) and “Dude to the right of you looks majestic” (n.p.). After the boy imagines all of the good that comes from a new haircut, the barber finishes his hair and the boy pays him. He walks out of the barber shop ready to conquer the world.

Barnes’s words and James’s illustrations teach young African American readers to take pride in their appearance and have confidence in their ability to achieve greatness. The book does not perpetuate stereotypes or paint African Americans as uneducated characters with little to offer the world. It empowers young African American boys to embrace their confidence and make their presence known to the world. Additionally, Barnes’s writing and James’s illustrations acknowledge the variety of African Americans’ appearances. For instance, Barnes (2017) wrote “There are two dudes, one with locs, the other cornrows, and a lady with a butterscotch complexion” (n.p.). The illustrations throughout the book show African Americans with different skin tones, facial features, and hair styles. As a result, children who are from mixed cultural backgrounds, similar to Owens’s background, can relate to the characters as well. Furthermore, Barnes’s style of writing, specifically his syntax and diction, reflects how children today speak. For example, when talking about what will happen after the boy gets a fresh haircut, Barnes wrote “Every person in the shop will rise to their feet and give you a round of applause for being

so FLY” (n.p.). Barnes and James created a character where African American boys can relate to. The book and its characters celebrate confident African Americans. In the note from the author, Barnes explained his choice to write a story about a boy in a barber shop by saying “other than the church, the experience of getting a haircut is pretty much the only place in the black community where a black boy is...treated like royalty” (n.p.).

Barnes's *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* is also a valuable read for children who are not African American. It gives them the opportunity to see African American children in a modern-day context. The boy in the book could easily be their best friend, neighbor, or the child who sits next to them at school. Due to the nature of the story, it would be simple for teachers to include it in their curriculum outside of special events such as Black History Month since the book does not require a special discussion about African American history. While books that detail the horrors of slavery and racism are necessary in classrooms across the United States, teachers must also include books whose characters reflect the children in their classroom. White students see themselves in characters throughout mainstream literature, but African American students do not have that luxury. To combat the shortcomings of mainstream children's literature, teachers should incorporate a variety of African American literature to tell both historical and modern stories.

Hispanic and Latinx Children's Literature

When the push for multicultural literature during the Civil Rights Movement era led to an increase of books about minorities, the main focus was on African Americans, not Hispanics, Latinxs, or other minorities (Martinez & Nash, 1990, p. 600). Blatt (1968) searched several children's literature book lists and found nine books portrayed Mexican Americans compared to the seventy-eight that portrayed African Americans (p. 447). Rowan explained the reason

Mexican Americans were an invisible minority in comparison to African Americans as they did not enter the country in large numbers or have a war fought over their personhood and discrimination against them was not as well-known (as cited in Blatt, 1968, p. 446). In 1992, Nieto suggested publishers were leery of taking on Hispanic literature because the group did not have political or commercial power (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 633). Additionally, Hispanic children's literature emphasized folklore, poetry, legends, and the like as opposed to the childhood experiences mainstream literature typically portrays (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 633).

Another prominent challenge which may have hindered the amount of Hispanic children's literature is the subgroups encased within the term Hispanic. The 1990 United States Census Bureau included Chicano, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexican American, Cuban, Central American, South American, and other Hispanic origin under the Hispanic category (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 633). Today, the common use of the term refers to Spanish-speaking peoples whereas Latinx specifically refers to those who are from Latin America. Despite the possible reasons Hispanic and Latinx literature may not have been a main focus of publishing companies, since the growth of the Hispanic population accounted for over half of the growth of the total population in the United States from 2000 to 2010, children's literature should reflect this growth (Humes et al., 2011, p. 3).

Wagoner (1982) examined twenty-seven fiction and nonfiction children's books about Mexican Americans and published between 1970 and 1982 (p. 274). One book, *Chicano, Amigo* written by Maurine Gee in 1972, is about a White boy who saves a Mexican American boy from bullies (p. 277). Similar to some of the books published about African Americans, this story appears to imply White characters are minority characters' protectors. Of the books she examined, Wagoner found all but six depicted Mexican American characters as living in rural

areas and struggling financially (p. 275). Over half of the books presented the characters' primary occupations as migrant farm laborers; however, other unskilled careers were portrayed as well (p. 275). Wagoner's finding was concerning because, according to Eiseman, eighty percent of Mexican Americans lived in urban areas in 1973 and the children's books did not reflect this statistic (as cited in Wagoner, 1982, p. 275).

Nilsson (2005) analyzed primary content analysis studies published between 1966 and 2003 about multicultural children's literature (p. 535). While it appeared as though there was an increase in the availability of children's literature about Hispanic culture, actual improvements depended on which specific Hispanic group was portrayed as well as the type of book (p. 543). Nilsson discovered fictional literature during the 1970s and 1980s was especially lacking in authentic Hispanic representation (p. 543). The literature during this time either lacked Hispanic characters entirely or included stereotyped and unrealistic characters which occasionally perpetuated negative views of Hispanics (pp. 543-544). After examining seventy-two young children's fiction books published from 1976 to 1978, Madsen and Wickersham did not find a single Hispanic American protagonist (as cited in Nilsson, 2005, p. 537). In regard to stereotypes, Gast stated writers stereotype Mexicans as dark-skinned Catholics who are disinterested in education and live in rural areas (as cited in Blatt, 1968, p. 449). Furthermore, the results of Nieto's analysis of fifty-six books published between 1972 and 1982 indicated assimilation was an important character goal and White characters appeared to be Puerto Rican characters' saviors (as cited in Nilsson, 2005, p. 544).

Overall, Nilsson's analysis of primary content studies showed stereotyping was less severe in Mexican American literature for lower elementary grades and more severe in children's literature about Puerto Rican culture (p. 545). Klein declared the amount of Hispanic

representation in children's literature not only failed to reflect the Hispanic population in the United States in 1990, but also exhibited greater inequality than the amount of representation in literature compared to the Hispanic population in 1964 (as cited in Nilsson, 2005, pp. 544-545). In other words, the amount of Hispanic representation in children's literature more closely aligned with the Hispanic population statistics in 1964 than it did in 1990 (pp. 544-545). To combat this issue and support authors and illustrators who capture the Latinx experience, the American Libraries Association established the Pura Belpré Award for Latinx authors and illustrators in 1996 (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2013, p. 83).

Using Spanish and/or Spanglish is a major concern of Latinx and Hispanic children's literature. In 1967, Fishman argued the "high" form of bilingualism is when speakers keep English and Spanish strictly separated and the "low" form is when speakers mix the two languages (as cited in Chappell & Faltis, 2006, p. 257). Fishman's divisive opinion can transfer into Latinx and Hispanic children's literature and negatively impact young bilingual readers. Chappell and Faltis claimed main characters' attitudes toward Spanglish and what constitutes "good" Spanish guides bilingual Latinx children on how to use Spanish (p. 253). The inclusion of Spanish, Spanglish, and English in children's literature and the attention authors give to characters' connections to cultural values send a message to readers about bilingual expectations. Chappell and Faltis examined fifteen Latinx children's books with bilingual themes and discovered some portrayed characters as either being able to speak Spanish despite lacking an understanding of their heritage or being unable to speak Spanish despite having strong connections to both their heritage and extended family (pp. 255, 260). When bilingual characters are either unaware of their culture or resent having to participate in cultural traditions, it implies Latinx children should assimilate to mainstream American culture (p. 254). On the other hand,

children's books might mistakenly limit Latinx culture to Spanish terms for food and family and thus fail to acknowledge the complexity of the culture (Chappell & Faltis, 2006, p. 256).

Bilingual multicultural children's literature sends implicit and explicit messages about how Latinx and Hispanic children should balance their cultures and languages.

How authors choose to incorporate Spanish in an English-based text partially determines the cultural authenticity of a book (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003, p. 258). Two types of translation in Hispanic and Latinx children's books are literal, which is word-for-word, and nonliteral, which is essentially paraphrasing or summarizing (p. 258). When literal translation is used too frequently, authors disrupt the flow of the book and give the impression they are trying to teach Spanish, which disengages bilingual readers (p. 258). If a book contains a glossary, authors do not need to translate words or phrases in the story. Balancing Spanish and English is an important consideration when selecting Hispanic and Latinx literature because monolingual English readers need enough information to discern the meaning of Spanish terms without making the text redundant for bilingual readers (p. 249). When Hispanic and Latinx literature relies on literal translations alone, it is clear the intended audience is English-speaking children and not the children whose culture is portrayed (p. 258).

Authors of multicultural children's literature who incorporate Spanish terms throughout their writing must properly use the words. When kinship Spanish terms are integrated into texts it should be natural and accurate. Typically, these terms are least appropriate in narrative portions of stories told from a third-person point of view (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003, p. 249). Some books, such as *Get Set! Swim!* written by Jeannine Atkins in 1998, mistakenly use intimate names for parents, such as *mami*, in the narrative instead of in the dialogue of a child speaking to her mother where it is linguistically appropriate (p. 252). A few Spanish culinary terms, such as

tortilla and salsa, are common in mainstream American culture and have become loanwords, meaning they are incorporated into mainstream vocabulary (p. 253). Therefore, the terms might be familiar to monolingual English readers and do not require explanation or translation (p. 253). However, it is essential the culinary terms in books match the culture in the story in order to avoid an inauthentic situation such as a Mexican family preparing a Puerto Rican dish (p. 255). Culturally authentic Hispanic and Latinx books use Spanish terms correctly in appropriate contexts.

Example of Quality Hispanic and Latinx Children's Literature

Sarah Carrion is a current elementary school teacher who grew up in Honduras with American parents (S. Carrion, personal communication, July 20, 2018). Growing up, Carrion found numerous children's books that presented the mainstream White American, two-parent family and numerous Spanish books that captured Hispanic and Latinx culture (S. Carrion, personal communication, July 20, 2018). However, she did not find books about protagonists from mixed cultures "who struggled with their third culture—a mix of the two cultures" (S. Carrion, personal communication, July 20, 2018). Carrion also stated that while authors are able to portray cultures other than their own, authors who are cultural insiders authentically capture the essence of the culture (S. Carrion, personal communication, July 20, 2018). Moving forward in the future, she would like to see children's literature about mixed cultures and characters who, like her, belong to more than one culture (S. Carrion, personal communication, July 20, 2018).

Mango, Abuela, and Me written by Meg Medina and illustrated by Angela Dominguez is an excellent example of Hispanic and Latinx children's literature about the mixture of cultures Carrion referred to in her interview. It is a Pura Belpré Award Honor Book for Narration and Illustration. The book is primarily written in English with a few Spanish words and phrases

throughout the text. *Mango, Abuela, and Me* does not contain a glossary; therefore, the meaning of most of the Spanish words are in the text. The narrator is young Mia who is Latinx and has presumably grown up in the United States with her parents; however, Medina did not specify the location.

Mia's Hispanic and Latinx grandmother comes to live with the family after Mia's grandfather passes away. Mia wants to communicate with her grandmother, but her grandmother does not speak English and she does not speak Spanish (Medina, 2015, n.p.). Mia shares her disappointment with readers when she states "My *español* is not good enough to tell her the things an *abuela* should know" (n.p.) and "her English is too *poquito* to tell me all the stories I want to know" (n.p.). Abuela and Mia begin to teach each other their native languages (n.p.). After visiting the pet store, Mia buys her grandmother a parrot since she misses the parrot in her mango trees at her old home. Mia and her grandmother name the parrot Mango and speak to it in English and Spanish (n.p.). Shortly thereafter, Mia's Spanish improves, Abuela learns complex English phrases, and Mango continues to speak in both languages (n.p.). Mia and Abuela are finally able to communicate effectively.

Medina and Dominguez used literature to celebrate Hispanic and Latinx culture. Dominguez's award-winning illustrations are realistic and respectful of the culture. Medina did not specify which Latin American country Abuela is from and critics may argue the diversity among Hispanic and Latinx cultures demands authors indicate the characters' countries of origin; however, in this story, the characters' circumstance translates across Hispanic and Latinx cultures. The situation is realistic because some Latinx family members who grow up in a predominantly English-speaking country do not speak Spanish and are therefore unable to communicate effectively with their Hispanic relatives. Medina's incorporation of Spanish words

and phrases is culturally authentic because they are used appropriately and have discernible meanings for monolingual English speakers without making the text redundant for bilingual readers. The book gives young Latinx children an opportunity to relate to a character who struggles to communicate with a loved one because of a language barrier. *Mango, Abuela, and Me* integrates Hispanic and Latinx culture as well as a culture identical to American culture. As a result, it allows children who are a blend of these cultures to read a story about cultures coming together as a young girl embraces her heritage and the world in which she grew up.

Medina's *Mango, Abuela, and Me* is also a valuable read for children who are not part of the Hispanic or Latinx cultures. Similar to the boy in *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (Barnes, 2017), Mia could be their best friend, neighbor, or the child who sits next to them in class. Mia's story about bonding with her grandmother shows monolingual children what it is like to not be able to communicate with family members who speak different languages. Medina introduced children to some Spanish words and phrases, which could inspire them to learn about the language and also provides an opportunity for Spanish-speaking students to share their Hispanic and Latinx culture. The nature of the story is versatile because teachers can use it in the classroom outside of special events such as Cinco de Mayo and National Hispanic Heritage Month. Blatt (1968) stated holidays and festivals are not the entirety of a culture (p. 448). Multicultural children's literature should have a strong presence year around, not only during a few select times throughout the year. Medina's *Mango, Abuela, and Me* is a relevant class read all year long.

Conclusion

Impact on Children from Different Cultures

The presence of multiculturalism in children's literature positively impacts readers who are not members of the cultures these books portray. Larrick (1965) stated "There seems little chance of developing the humility so urgently needed for world cooperation instead of world conflict, as long as our children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books" (p. 63). Literature impacts how children view those around them. Readers might mistake stereotypes in literature for facts, especially if it is their only exposure to the culture. Rosberg's 1995 study exposed native English-speaking and bilingual children to multicultural books written in various languages (as cited in Nilsson, 2005, p. 535). The study suggested the books helped increase children's awareness of and appreciation for the structures of different languages (as cited in Nilsson, 2005, p. 535). Adult readers also benefit from literature that accurately represents diverse cultures. Nilsson (2005) indicated teachers, administrators, counselors, and policymakers would benefit from multicultural children's literature written by cultural insiders because it exposes them to the challenges children of various cultures face (p. 535).

Suh and Samuel (2011) argued children become responsible members of the world when they are exposed to different cultures (p. 2). One reason to expose children to multiple cultures is to mold them into responsible citizens who can participate in industry and politics on a global scale (p. 4). In other words, children need to understand diverse cultures before they can effectively communicate with the people of those cultures. Klefstad and Martin (2013) argued "Teachers help children appreciate diversity by giving them opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds, even vicariously, by reading about the characters' problems, conflicts, and challenges and experiencing the same emotions and feelings" (p. 75).

Children can learn to connect with different people by first learning to relate to multicultural characters in books. In one sense, bonding with characters in multicultural books

allows children to experience cultures to an extent and discover similarities between their lives and those of the characters (Klefstad & Martin, 2013, p. 75). Author Monica Brown (2008) argued descriptive language in literature has the greatest chance of reaching children who are not familiar with the traditions of the culture they are reading about (p. 316). Relating to diverse characters and learning to respect differences while understanding similarities between cultures encourages children accept others. Wilson and Wilson (2008) stated children who are exposed to diverse cultures at a young age are better able to accept others (p. 207). When children appreciate and value diversity, they can form meaningful relationships with their classmates and neighbors. Therefore, multicultural children's literature is an important tool for introducing children to diversity and teaching them to respect members of all cultural groups.

Literature is children's window into the unknown world. They may not be aware of other cultures, but literature introduces them to diverse characters and different ways of life. Reading also allows children to catch a glimpse of what the world may be like through the eyes of a stranger in a distant country or their classmate who is from a different culture. The presence of multiculturalism in children's literature shows children who are part of the majority in the United States that other people have worthwhile stories and experiences.

Impact on Children from Minority Cultures

The United States has long been a nation where diverse cultures coexist. Unfortunately, children's literature is not representative of its increasingly diverse population. As a result, a significant number of children do not see representations of their culture in books in classrooms or stores. Children who do not see characters who resemble themselves might assume people like them do not belong in stories. A lack of multiculturalism in children's literature might make it

difficult for teachers, parents, and guardians to engage children in reading because the characters, settings, and events represent unfamiliar cultural norms.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer who has been vocal about the dangers of the lack of diversity in children's literature. While growing up in Nigeria, she read American and British children's books (Adichie, 2009). When she began to write stories, they mirrored the books she read even though she was not blonde, did not have blue eyes, and had never played in the snow or eaten an apple (Adichie, 2009). Adichie recalled "I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify" (Adichie, 2009). Her perception of books was people who looked like her and had similar experiences as she had did not belong in stories. Eventually, she discovered the works of Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, and realized "girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature" (Adichie, 2009). Children from cultures other than mainstream White America deserve to have a strong presence in stories. No child should grow up thinking they have no place in literature. According to Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001), giving children the opportunity to read relatable stories allows them reflect on their growth and development as people (p. 818). Children's literature must mirror the diversity that exists in the world so every child can read stories similar to their own.

Multicultural children's literature also enables children to see the differences and similarities between cultures. Latinx author Monica Brown (2008) stated her writing is at its best when she is respectful of the distinctiveness of her characters' culture by "not ignoring common ground, but not universalizing cultural difference" (p. 316). When children read literature about their culture, they should see the unique components of their culture are important. At the same

time, children learn to relate to others by reading literature that portrays aspects of the human experience. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) summarized the importance of children finding themselves in literature by arguing “To read literature that mirrors themselves and their lives is to feel valued—to have power” (p. 818). Literature should empower children, not perpetuate stereotypes about their culture.

Authors who write multicultural literature are better equipped if they are writing about their own culture because then they have an insider's point of view. They understand the nuances, norms, and language of the culture. Their knowledge allows them to create genuine characters with realistic experiences. It also shows young readers from the culture that people like them can be successful authors who tell relatable stories. However, authors who are not cultural insiders are capable of writing quality stories if they have experience with the culture and do extensive research. Their stories are not necessarily as powerful as those of a cultural insider because young readers who are from the culture depicted may not take ownership of a story told from an outsider's perspective (as cited in Barry, 1998, p. 635).

Past, Present, and Future

In the past, children's literature was a way to dehumanize or stereotype African Americans, Hispanics, and Latinxs. During the Civil Rights era, there was a push for more diverse books. However, diverse books did not always portray minority characters in respectful ways. Some portrayed White Americans as the defenders of minorities as minority characters were passive in the face of racism (McNair, 2003, p. 28). Other books went as far to portray White Americans as victims of racism (Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002, pp. 272-273). Today's children's literature has made strides to become less blatantly inaccurate, yet more work still needs to be done. Seemingly well-meaning authors have perpetuated positive stereotypes which

may not be as noticeable as negative stereotypes, but still contribute to misconceptions of minority cultures. Books today do not always authentically represent African Americans, Hispanics, and Latinxs. For instance, some books depict slaves as content with their position in life, which is a gross misrepresentation of African American history (Campbell, 2017, p. 10). Another example is books about Hispanic and Latinx culture sometimes inaccurately incorporate Spanish through excessive literal translations, improper use of words, and/or incorrect context of words. Multicultural children's literature in the United States that focuses on African Americans, Hispanics, and Latinxs has made progress since the 1960s; however, it can still perpetuate stereotypes and the amount of multicultural children's literature is not representative of the statistics concerning the minority population.

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