

ONCE UPON A TIME... SOME NOTES ON MULTICULTURALISM, CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND EDUCATION IN THE USA

CARMEN VALERO GARCÉS
Universidad de Alcalá

(Resumen)

Este trabajo analiza la relación entre el multiculturalismo, la literatura infantil y el sistema educativo en los Estados Unidos. Uno de cada cinco estudiantes de colegio en los Estados Unidos proviene de un hogar donde se habla un idioma distinto del Inglés. Tal variedad de idiomas y culturas proporciona una atmósfera multicultural que enriquece y ahonda la pluralidad existente en los Estados Unidos. Entonces, pues, si el multiculturalismo es una característica de la sociedad norteamericana, este fenómeno debe verse reflejado en la literatura infantil y en su educación. Sin embargo, la obviedad y aparente claridad de este truismo, como lo son en la mayoría de los truismos, debe ser analizada. Este análisis será desarrollado a través de varias preguntas.

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Children's Literature is present in any culture. Considering the fact that in the USA there are many cultures together and that one out of five school-age children comes from a home in which language other than English is spoken it seems easy to assume that the USA is a multilingual and multicultural society. This paper examines this assumption through some questions and some tentative answers. My work tends to be suggestive and exploratory rather than prescriptive, and more research needs to be done.

The data will be taken from children's books edited in the eighties and the nineties; and from reading lists for children recommended by specialized journals and publications. The study of some recent education policies to help incorporation of multiculturalism in the classroom will also be considered

To begin with, the first question is:

1. IS MULTICULTURALISM A MAIN FEATURE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN THE USA?

Defining multiculturalism is not an easy task. The recent debate opened in the emergent multicultural societies in some European countries on this topic proves that. In a recent article (El País, Mar. 23, 2002), Joaquín Arango, a professor at the Complutense University in Madrid, Spain, highlights two terms that are often considered synonyms when in reality they are not. These terms are: multiculturalism and multiculturalism. According to the author, the first term, multiculturalism, refers to a real situation and connotes cultural diversity or pluralism. The second term, multiculturalism, is not a term that refers to a condition but rather to an ideology or orientation. It is not a word that has just one meaning; it is used in different ways in different contexts. In one of its meanings, multiculturalism is defined as an ideology or movement, particularly American that promotes the cultural development and praise of ethnic groups that have suffered a long history of racial oppression. According to Joaquín Arango, many people see this as a threat to the dominant culture, while others see it as a way of deflecting attention from more important sources and forms of racism.

A second definition of multiculturalism uses it as an adjective describing the orientation of immigration policies that aim at integrating immigrants and ethnic minorities into society through their participation and through the assurance that these minorities can serve as institutions that mediate between the State and the individual. Choosing one definition or the other also leads to different consequences that will not be studied at present because they do not fit into the scope of this paper. It was only meant to show that the debate remains open.

In the case of the USA, the slogan 'we live in a multicultural society' is commonly accepted there. However, as Appiah (65) points out "what people normally have in mind when they say this slogan is that the USA is a multicultural nation: a geographical unity and a judicial and constitutional fact; while being a multicultural society means groups of people with distinct cultures. To speak of American society as multicultural in this sense might seem confusing and, even, contradictory, as most people seem to perceive this society as groups of people with a common culture with a single set of political institutions in a shared social space." This debate is still open and more than 10 pages would be needed to show the state of the art, so I will just concentrate on one aspect of multiculturalism: multicultural education.

The sense I will use this term in this paper is meant to be an approach to education and to public culture that acknowledges the diversity of cultures and subcultures in the USA and which proposes to deal with that variety in ways other than imposing the values and ideas of the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) cultural tradition.

2. WHEN WAS THE MULTICULTURAL APPROACH INTRODUCED IN SCHOOL? WHAT DOES IT CONSIST OF? IS IT POSSIBLE TO TRACE ITS EVOLUTION IN THE LAST DECADE?

The multicultural movement is not new in the USA. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act is the beginning of this new policy. The goal of this Act was to help students whose native language was not English and who had learning difficulties with the language. The adoption of this law was closely linked to the growing number of Mexican-Americans. In 1974-1975 the Bilingual Education Act changed status from temporary to permanent (Bilingual Education Act 1974, 88 Stat. 503). At the same time the resolution of the Supreme Tribunal in favor of a bilingual education (*Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court, 414 U.S. 563) made it applicable to all national groups (see Valero 871- 879), which favors the publication of multicultural materials. In the 80s the bilingual education receives a new impulse with the American Association of School Librarians' (AASL)- organism in charge of regulating textbooks and materials used in the classrooms-, urgent recommendations in favor of creating materials to help ethnic integration. Such a tendency has continued in the 90s and the first years of the 21st century with the population of foreign origin increase and the growing interest for its language and culture.

Most teachers, school administrators, school boards, and educational publishers incorporated these goals of inclusion and diversity to their reading programs. In doing so, they tried to answer the various questions that the idea of multicultural education raised: what to teach? How to teach? Who to teach whom? Different answers were- and are still being- provided, all dealing with its racial tensions, ethnic hostilities, religious conflicts, class divisions, gender grievances, and ideological conflicts of the different groups involved.

Four important documents reflect the educational policies and their evolution in California and New York- two of the most populous states – as well as of the influential NCSS (National Council for the Social Studies)- the largest professional organization of teachers in the USA most directly involved in multicultural education. These documents are (1) the 1991 report of the New York social studies review committee: *One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence*, which laid the basis for, and was partly incorporated in (2) *Understanding Diversity*, the policy statement adopted by the New York State Board of Regents in July 1991; (3) *the California History-Social Science Framework* adopted in 1987; and the (4) the *NCSS Curriculum Guidelines for Multicultural Education*, issued in 1991, which revised the Council's 1976 guidelines on ethnic studies.

When reading these policy documents, the three main underlying ideas are: Students should be presented with a realistic view of American history; curricula should be language sensitive; and students should learn that "difference" does not necessarily imply "inferiority". Other multicultural themes that are suggested, but partially answered, refer to the preference for "pluralism" over "assimilation"; the necessity for students to learn to appreciate and respect cultural diversity; and the need to emphasize difference, not deficit. These recommendations are a way to overcome the typical response of educators in the 1960s and 1970s to identify and focus on deficiencies in minority students. In the 1980s and 1990s a new position arises: the school should adjust to the child, and not the other way. Thus, multiculturalism is seen as "the ideal of citizens working together in a common policy while retaining their memberships in distinct cultural communities that agree with one another to mutual respect" (Stotsky *How Multicultural Classroom Instruction is Undermining Our Children's Ability to Read, Write, and Reason* 9). However, reality is somehow different, as we will see in the next questions and answers.

3. HOW MUCH OF THIS MULTICULTURALISM IS REFLECTED IN POPULAR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND IN THE RECOMMENDED READING LISTS AT SCHOOL?

According to the recommendations of the NCSS the determining factor to include multicultural sections that represent different cultural groups should be the number of students belonging to these specific groups and subgroups (non-mainstream students). That is, the larger the number of non-mainstream students, the larger the number of non-mainstream selections. However, the review of some reading lists published in specialized magazines as well as of the lists of the books that students read at some schools with a high percentage of non-main stream students show that the NCSS recommendation is not followed.

Rather than just interest in other cultures what we find is interest in traditional values present in popular cultural. In this sense Paul Vitz conducted a study on the cultural contents of readers in the 1970s and early 1980s. His research did not focus on multiculturalism but it was somehow connected with popular culture and tradition. Concerning this aspect, he found that there was little representation of religion and patriotism as well as little support for business; and neither the life of American workers nor immigrants were mentioned.

As for other traditional values such as civic character and identity, which are also present in most cultures, students are exposed to historically significant works (such as Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Emerson's essays or Thoreau's *Walden* and "Civil

Disobedience”) and to works that portray the moral values, myths, tensions, contradictions and failings of American culture as represented in novels and plays such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Black Boy*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Outsiders* or *The Pigman* which are among the top thirty to forty titles taught in grades 7-12. Those works focus mainly on the experience of young protagonists and loners that emphasize individuality, confusion, instability, or moral ambivalence. At this point I agree with Stotsky (*Multicultural Literature and Civic Education: A Problematic Relationship with Possibilities* 232) when she says that these works are unlike to inspire civic virtue in students. In fact they may imply that most Americans are driven by self-interest and greed and are incapable of recognizing other cultures.

Advocates of multiculturalism defend the inclusion of multicultural literature in the students’ curriculum for egalitarian purposes as well as for reinforcing self-esteem and portraying non-mainstream cultures in a way that does not stereotype them. In this sense, Roberta Long (Jones 64), a teacher of children’s literature, explains “if black children or Native Americans or Asians don’t see themselves in books, they won’t see themselves as important people. And we will be sending that message to white children, too.”

This comment illustrates the recommendations to create materials for the minorities made by the American Association of School Librarian (ASSL):

(1) authenticity and honesty in them, (2) accuracy with respect to historical and scientific facts, (3) appropriate in-depths treatment of subject, (4) clearly drawn characters relevant to the child’s world, (5) emphasis on the dignity and worth of the individual and group, (6) sensitivity to the needs of all children, (7) quality illustrations and design, (8) appropriate literary style; therefore be it resolved, that publishers and producers, editors, and reviewers be added to consider thoughtfully this resolution in preparing, developing, and promoting materials about minority groups, and be it further resolved, that publishers and producers be asked to make a special effort to involve more writers and illustrators from various ethnic background in the production of such materials (Cruger 124).

4 . ARE THERE ANY ELEMENTS OF THESE ‘MINORITY’ CULTURES INCORPORATED IN THE MAINSTREAM CULTURE?

Ethnic elements incorporated in the literature recommended for children are perceived in the characters’ names; in the illustrations suggesting children or adults from other cultures interacting together; or in the characters’ portrait as nonwhite. This ethnic integration is sometimes brought out explicitly, but very often is done in a subtle way as when learning that the main character is black only from the illustrations, or from the characters’ names.

Other traditional themes such as religion, being different religions associated to different ethnic groups are rarely mentioned. And when this is done, some inaccurate impressions derived from stereotypical attitudes sometimes emerge from these readers. These stereotypes include the assumption that, for example, a spiritual life exists chiefly among the Indian and, to some extent, among the Mexican Americans, identified as Catholics. They may also imply that Protestant religiosity is an almost completely historical phenomenon.

As a way to avoid this stereotyping, at the 1991 NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) Annual Conference, Marsha and Tom Savage (7-11) formulated some questions for each non-mainstream group for promoting antiracist or anti-sexist curricula.

These were: 1. Are problems handled individually, allowing the main characters to use their own effort to solve their problems? Or are all problems solved through the intervention of an Anglo American? Do the characters depict individuals, not stereotypes? Is the language free from derogatory terms or descriptions? Are the different cultures treated with respect?

These are questions that still need an answer.

5. HOW CAN MATERIALS REFERRING TO OTHER CULTURES BE CLASSIFIED? DO THEY SHARE ANY SPECIFIC FEATURES?

Stotsky (74) in her study about the reading lists recommended at school for the K-12 curriculum, analyzed the selections of significant publishing houses such as D.C. Heath, Harcourt Brace, Houghton Mifflin, Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, Scott Foresman, and Silver Burdett Ginn for 1993 and classified them into six categories:

1. Nonethnic or mainstream commonly defined as "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture" (WASP).
2. "White ethnics" or European ethnic groups such as Amish, Greek Americans, or Italian Americans excluded from the "affirmative action" categories.
3. Ethnic groups included in "affirmative action" categories (African American, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans).
4. European countries.
5. Non-European countries, but with European ancestry (e.g. Australia and Canada).
6. General content.

Stotsky (76) found that all series devote a certain number of selections to general content and/or mainstream, to non-ethnic content, and to ethnic groups. However, there are some significant differences: First, the percentage of works dealing with ethnic groups is considerably lower when compared with mainstream or general content. Second, within ethnic groups most readings refer to ethnic groups in the affirmative action, mostly Asian Americans and Hispanic (specially Mexico). Third, there are also substantial differences among the different publishing houses. Thus, Houghton Mifflin and Harcourt Brace dedicate more than 50% of their publishing to ethnic groups in the affirmative action, Scott Foreman and Macmillan dedicate between 40% and 47% while D. C. Heath and Silver Burdett Ginn only dedicate 21% and 36% respectively of their publishing. Only two out of six dedicate some titles to white ethnics. In the case of selections reflecting European countries, Harcourt Brace and Silver Burdett Ginn offer the higher percentage (32%). In the case of non-European countries, the percentage is considerably lower, Macmillan (37%) being the one with the highest percentage, followed by Houghton Mifflin (28.2%).

Keeping in mind this classification, the analysis of the readings programmed in several schools of the states of New York, California and Minnesota and the revision of some studies and comments by specialists in children's literature like Joels, Stotsky, or Schon provide similar information. Thus, in programs labeled as multicultural, the selections of ethnic content refer practically all of them to groups included in the "affirmative action". As a way of illustration, we can consider Stotsky's research. She found that for 9 year-old children, 53 out of 59 readings, and for 11 year-old children, 53 out of 56 readings refer to groups in the affirmative action. Of them, between 60% and 70% of the readings for children between 9 and 11 years old belong to the two main groups that correspond to the main minorities. These are Eastern cultures, mainly China and Japan, and Hispanic culture, mainly Mexico.

Furthermore, in multicultural programs, when referring to mainstream American cultural content, the selection of readings doesn't usually refer to the ethnic groups of European origin (e.g. Scandinavian, German, Irish), but rather these groups historically of immigrants are excluded of the literature as well as their tensions and conflicts with the dominant culture or with another racial group. A conclusion that rises from this data is that being more than 70 % of the population of European origin, this group is scarcely represented.

6. HOW DOES THIS TYPE OF LITERATURE GET TO THE NEW READERS? IN ENGLISH? IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE? AS TRANSLATED TEXTS? AS ADAPTATIONS? AS BILINGUAL BOOKS?

At the present time, most literary works studied by American students, specially the top forty or so major titles, have been written by American authors or by authors whose first language is English. However there are two other channels that must be taken into consideration when referring to multiculturalism: translations and bilingual books (here referring to books including the text in English and a translation into another language). In the case of translations, translations of quality works is seen as a way to advancing children's literary works in other countries by some specialists. This activity, however, has its own problems as the editor Crawford (87) pointed out: "The basic reasons we editors are tempted by foreign books is that they are exotic" and this same "exotic quality" is often what seems to stand in the way of a book's acceptance", in other words, this "exotic quality" may influence public's interest and decrease sales.

Special attention must be paid to the *Mildred Batchelder Award* that rewards writers' excellence, publishers' good practice, and translators' work. Since 1968 the American Library Association annually gives this prize to a U.S. publisher for the most outstanding translated children's book. This book must be originally published in a foreign country and then translated into English.

Mildred Batchelder (34) for whom the award is named, stated the philosophical purpose of the award herself:

When children of one country come to know and love the books and stories of many countries, they have made an important beginning towards international understanding. To know the classic stories of a country creates a climate, an attitude for understanding the people for whom the literature is a heritage. When children know they are reading in translation, the same stories that children in another country are reading, a sense of nearness grows and expands. Interchange of children's books between countries, through translations, influences communication between the peoples of those countries, and if the books chosen for travel from language to language are worthy books, the resulting communication may be deeper, richer, more sympathetic, more enduring. I accept and believe these assumptions.

The prize has been awarded thirty times, and mostly to European authors (Scandinavian and German writers holding the highest percentage). Fiction dominates the winners' list, including themes such as war, courage, and survival, usually absent from American lists but common in popular literature. As Lo and Leahy (220) point out: "The

Batchelder Award books provide an effective starting point for the exploration of complex human problems and joys from multiple cultural perspectives.” In this sense it may play an important role in both the diffusion of other cultures and the integration of a multiplicity of cultures.

Mildred Batchelder Award –and let us remember that it is granted to a translated work—it incorporates conflicting topics as a necessary starting point for the experimentation of the face children to understand the human complexity and to favor the understanding. It is a prize that doesn’t enjoy a great popularity, but that it completes a work of diffusion of other cultures and of important integrative paper when pleading for the multiplicity of cultures. I agree with Lo and Leahy when they write:

A reduction of ethnocentrism is the first step towards global understanding and a respect for cultures and traditions different from our own. There is no one right way to think and feel, and no society can claim to have all of the answers; we can each gain perspective and insight into our world by examining the perspective of other societies and cultures. (222)

It is necessary to repeat, however, that the international and multicultural character of these award-winning ones is limited practically to the European environment with a clear prevalence of the Scandinavian and Germanic countries (nine winners in each case), and that the award itself is not as highly recognized as other awards for children’s literature as the Caldecot Medal or Andersen Prize.

As for the strategies used to break cultural distances, these are usually diverse and there is not uniformity in the treatment of specific references of this type. The tendency is to keep proper names, names of places, of objects, of products, of foods or traditions as in the original text, and to avoid to substitute them for their equivalent in the new reader’s culture. Less common resources are the addition of information, the use of footnotes and the use of short explanations at the beginning or the end of the book.

With respect to bilingual books, we need to go back to the 70s with the Bilingual Education Act and the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court Resolution in favor of bilingual education as we mentioned before in question (2). By this time, multicultural education was considered as the only approach that could broaden the horizons of American schoolchildren and inculcate respect for racial and ethnic minority groups as well as a way to address the academic deficiencies of minority children. This policy and the already mentioned AASL strong recommendations in the 80s obviously help the production of bilingual materials.

In the case of Spanish, the growing rate of Hispanic population and the interest and demand of materials about their language and culture has resulted in the production of a high percentage of bilingual books. By a way of illustration I can mention the Center for the Study of Books in Spanish for Children and Adolescents at the California State University San Marcos, which included 141 titles in its web page <http://www.csusm.edu/campus_centers/csb/> for 1998 and it is regularly updated and increased, covering a wide range of topics.¹

1. Topics include adaptations of classic literature (*Antonio Machado para niños/Antonio Machado for Children*), popular stories (*Burrito de Belén/ The Little Donkey; Juan y los frijoles mágicos/Jack and the Beanstalk*); or stories with specific cultural content (*¡Feliz*

As in the case of translated book, ethnic integration or cultural assimilation is usually sought in three ways:

- 1) using stereotypes as thematic content; for example, introducing Mexican people as eating enchiladas, or poorly dressed.
- 2) using characters' names, places or objects from other cultures.
- 3) using illustrations that show children or adults of different races or ethnic groups together.

It is also worth to mention Tomlinson's (1998) interesting resource book *Children's Literature from Other Countries* which includes 724 quality titles from 29 countries outside the U.S. Tomlinson's work consists in an annotated bibliography of books that were originally published in other countries, either in English or any other language, and then later published in the U.S. The books are organized by genre, and each annotation includes age range, country of origin, and prizes won, as well as imprint information, plot summary, and evaluation.

7. IS MULTILINGUALISM ALSO CONSIDERED? WHICH LINGUISTIC QUALITY IS OFFERED? DO THE STUDENTS HAVE THE CHANGE TO EXPERIENCE OTHER LANGUAGES?

The fact that in the USA there is a traditional lack of official interest for the learning of foreign languages is largely accepted. This fact indirectly influences the possibility of reading books written in another language. Some detractors of multicultural education also criticize the content of the school programs and the quality of the language used. One of the most common criticism refers to the progressive impoverishment of the language. Such a fact is explained by the decision of simplifying it to avoid to be considered language as an instrument of the dominant class through which to exercise cultural imperialism and the oppression. Accordingly, some linguists, professors and researches are opposed to expose the students to "an English" above their capacity. The title of the book by Sandra Stotsky is quite significant: *Losing our Language. How Multicultural Classroom Instruction is Undermining Our Children's Ability to Read, Write, and Reason*. According to the study conducted by Stotsky (13). Data from this study show an inferior number of new words in recent glossaries or indexes and the use of relatively short sentences after comparing readings from the 20s to the 60s with others from the 90s. This fact contrasts, however, with the use of a higher quantity of non-English proper names and of words difficult to pronounce or to understand.

This tendency is considered challenging by some teachers and educators who talk about this attempt of authenticity as "pretentious, misleading, and out of place in the reading instructional text for English-language learners" (Stotsky 13).

Stotsky (14) also points out to some reasons for the restricted inclusion of multiculturalism in education, closely related to multilingualism These are:

cumpleaños, Josefina! Un cuento de primavera/ Happy Birthday Josefina! A Springtime Story; Renata juega al pringate, al balón y etcétera, etcétera / Renata plays with Mud, Soccer, Etcetera, Etcetera o Un mago en la corte: Cuentos y leyendas de la Comunidad de Madrid/ A Magician in the Court: Tales and Legends from the Community of Madrid).

1. National educational policies often adopt restrictions to give young readers unfamiliar or “foreign” materials.

2. The USA has not traditionally promoted second and third language acquisition and a lack of proficiency in other languages also restricts librarians’ interest to publish in a language other than English.

3. Professional preparation programs do not adequately train teachers to deal with unfamiliar cultures.

Publishing policies usually reject publication decisions when there is no profit or when there is no guarantee that the production and distribution of a particular book would cover the company’s costs as Crawford clearly explains and we mentioned before. This policy affects specifically to books in translation. If we compare the percentage of translated books in USA and in Spain, the difference is quite obvious: 2% in the case of USA and 50% in the case of Spain.

In the case of Spanish, the boom of books published in this language in the 90s caused big expectations but also big disillusiones for the way in which the transfer of information was- and is- done. The translation of works is commonly carried out for not very-well prepared translators with a deficient knowledge of the language, which leads to incorrect sentences, uncommon expressions or the use of a vocabulary full with Anglicism, false friends and even spelling errors. In Schon’s words:

Numerous indifferent and/or incompetent writers and translators produce, at best, flaccid copies –literal translations– that are poorly rendered. These contain linguistic aberrations including incorrect lexical constructions, unclear phrases and awkward expressions, as well as grammatical and typographical errors. (318)

In other cases they use translations made in Spain or in Latin America that sound too idiomatic and make their reading more difficult.

As for cultural transfer, two are the most outstanding aspects that it is necessary to highlight:

1) lack of consistency in the Spanish variety used (Mexican, Spanish from Spain or from a different Latino country), which is reflected in a mixture of use of *tú/ustedes/vosotros (voseo)* as well as in the vocabulary election.

2) lack of sensibility or ignorance of cultural differences as, for example, when translating typical products, dressings, or food, which are known with different names in different countries. This is the case of “grapefruit” that can be “un toronjo,” “una toronja,” or “un pomelo,” depending on the country.

Lack of attention to these aspects produces inaccurate translations, lack of fluency, of clarity and of logic that make the books unattractive for children and of limited interest on the part of the adult.

Some educators and professional organizations such as National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recommend four factors that may play a leading role in decisions about what works should be consider: the year of publication, the gender of the author, the activities engaged in by the characters, and the language used in the work. These factors, however, don’t imply literary merit, the moral import of a work, or its historical/cultural significance.

Carla Hayden (vi), as a representative of the American Library Association (ALA), also suggests five broad criteria in a resource book of multicultural materials and programs. She

states that the librarians should (1) look for a quality of reality that gives the reader a chance to experience something; (2) try to determine the author's commitment to portray cultural groups accurately; (3) avoid materials that sensationalize, enumerate unusual customs, or practice reversed stereotyping; (4) be sensitive to emphasis on cultural differences at the expense of similarities; and (5) whenever possible, use the same critical criteria appropriate for all types of literature- distinctive language and appropriate dialogue, style, relevance and potential interest, clear-cut plots, and believable characterizations. All these criteria, however, raise a number of practical questions about the authors chosen, the selections made, or the cultures involved. At the same time is difficult to offer general booklists as teachers gradually change their course offerings as they read new works and analyze their readability, literary merit, thematic relevance, and personal appeal for their students.²

8. CONCLUSION

Multiculturalism as an approach to education that acknowledges diversity of cultures is not a new issue in the USA. Since the 70's, when this debate started was incorporated, its evolution can be traced through the policies of some of the most populous states and the influential NCSS. However, there is not a nationwide policy and, although some changes can be traced in the traditional American values, these still continue to be dominant.

The analysis of some of the most relevant publishing houses in children's literature also provides some information: all publishing houses devote a number of selections to America's ethnic groups, but the category with the highest percentage still tends to be general content or mainstream (WASP). In the case of ethnic selections, most of them are about people in the affirmative action categories, which offers a very limited view of the ethnic diversity of the US inhabitants. It is also interesting to point out that the majority of the authors are American.

Other channels used to introduce new cultures are books published in English and in another language (bilingual books) and translations. In both cases, some criticism has been raised in terms of the quality of the translations. As for the selections made for the school programs, the basis on which books should be read or removed have not publicly being discussed. Broad criteria have been suggested, but they don't answer practical questions about writers, selections or cultures involved. Different options are possible depending on the characteristics of the designed programs: members of the particular non-mainstream groups in the area; members of the mainstream group; educative authorities; teachers or book reviewers; the editorial policy; or the advice of publisher's academic

2. In the case of Hispanic culture interesting publications on this topic are the works by I. Schon "The Best of the Latino Heritage: A Guide to the Best Juvenile" in *Books about Latino People and Cultures*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997; Schon, I. *Latino Heritage: A Guide to Juvenile Books about Latino People and Cultures*. Series V. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1995. Schon, I *Recommended Books in Spanish for Children and Young Adults, 1991-1995*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997.

consultant. These last two are commonly considered as being highly influential but more interested in market factors. The result, in most cases, is a short number of selections suggesting ethnic integration or cultural assimilation in students' reading lists.

Summarizing, even though the questions raised need to be explored in more detail, from what we have read we can conclude that nowadays multiculturalism and multilingualism are not real options in education, and that children's literature can not be considered multicultural in the USA. Furthermore, children's literature in the USA is still far from reflecting the multiculturalism that characterizes to the society. Interesting but insufficient initiatives exist. I would like to conclude with Stotsky's comments as an advise to take new steps:

[...] the traditional openness and fluidity of American society are in serious danger of disappearing as a motivating force in children's lives—not because this openness and fluidity no longer exist but because textbook editors and authors are imposing a spurious and artificial ethnic or racial grid onto the images children are forming of themselves and others. (92)

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