

Critical Conversations about Global and Multicultural Literature

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In the U.S., especially in large urban schools, the number of students from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds is growing. According to the most recent National Center for Education Statistics ((CES) report, between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of school-age children who are white decreased while the percentage of children from other racial and ethnic groups increased ((e.g. Hispanic and Asian children). However, the teachers in public elementary and secondary schools were still predominantly White (de Brey, et al., 2019). In order to prepare culturally responsive teachers, as literacy teacher educators, we believe that it is important for students to read widely as they explore and expand their knowledge of books that depict stories and characters that differ from their own lives and experiences. Bishop (1990))highlighted the value of children's literature as mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. This value guided our thinking and teaching as we used global and multicultural literature in our literacy courses. We made it a point to read aloud books to show examples of diverse texts. We became advocates of books as we brought and shared a variety of diverse texts. We even provided copies of children's and young adult books for the students to read so they would know about quality global and multicultural literature. We wanted students to read widely and share their insights about how these texts can help them understand the perspectives of others in society.

In this article, we discuss how students in our courses viewed the use of language variations in global and multicultural children's literature. Issues about language are close to our hearts as we ourselves speak more than one language beyond English. We believe that any instance where language is portrayed and treated as a deficit or speakers of certain languages are positioned as the "other" (Delpit, 2006) is worth exploring and unpacking.

Defining Global and Multicultural Literature

We consider global literature as "any book that is set in a global context outside the readers' own global location"((Short, 2016, p. 5)). For most students in our courses, this would mean any book set outside the United States. We also use this term to "include books authored by Americans and by insiders to a global culture""(Short, 2016, p. 5). We define multicultural literature as texts that "reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society", particularly books by and about groups "whose histories and cultures have been omitted, distorted, or undervalued" (Bishop, 1997, p.3). We also stress the importance of including books with socially diverse story elements (e.g. exceptionality, age, religion, class/ poverty, immigration, and sexual orientation))within our definition of multiculturalism because this is often an overlooked area.

Who We Are

As teacher educators of Asian-descent, we bring our own backgrounds and experiences to our teaching in a predominantly White population in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. We came together as a collegial group of faculty who bonded over our common interests in children's literature and diversity to form a community of practice ((Wenger, 1998).

The three of us met regularly to have conversations about our teaching. Maria Perpetua and Huili work with undergraduate students while Xiaoming teaches the students in the Master of Arts in Teaching ((MAT) program. Maria Perpetua and Xiaoming regularly teach a course in children's literature. Huili teaches a class on linguistically diverse learners where she guides students to use multilingual and multicultural children's literature to connect and teach diverse children. In our conversations with one another, we identified themes about our teaching and decided to highlight students' views of language variations across our courses. We share some classroom scenarios that made us examine how students viewed the use of language variations in global and multicultural children's literature. Students' views prompted us to reflect on the actions we took to disrupt the notion of language difference as a deficit.

Class Scenarios

After reading *Last Stop on Market Street* ((de la Peña, 2015), Linda (all student names are pseudonyms), a student in Maria Perpetua's undergraduate children's literature class, responded that she liked the story but was concerned about what she thought was "wrong grammar" in the book. She was referring to the following two sentences from the book: "'How come we gotta wait for the bus in all this wet?" (n.p.) and "'Nana, how come we don't got a car?'"((n.p.))

This award-winning picturebook tells a story about the different communities, community members, and transportation means through the voices of a young African-American boy and his grandmother. This book skillfully used urban African-American English to show how language is culturally representative of a community. Linda's initial thought was that the text encouraged "wrong use of grammar."

In contrast to Maria Perpetua's students, the MAT students in Xiaoming's class commented that the language variation in *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015) reflected the culture. They considered the use of dialect as an indicator of cultural authenticity. However, one student, Brittany, pointed out that even though this book is empowering, it does make her think of how she does not feel safe in certain areas. She was referring to the city nearby our university that has a large African-American community.

Our Actions

As we continuously reflected on our experiences as educators and students' responses to literature in our classes (Liwana, 2017), we found commonalities in our instructional approaches and how we engaged the students in critical conversations. For example, Maria Perpetua considered Linda's concern about the author's use of "incorrect grammar" as a teachable moment and involved the class in a critical conversation about language variations and language as power in texts (Janks, et al., 2013). The students also read more texts that included additional examples of language variations (see Table 1) to help them consider and think more about this issue. Students exchanged views about diversity in languages from the stories they read.

Title	Author/Year	Language Variation	Description
<i>Flossie & and the Fox</i>	Patricia McKissack, 1986	African American English	Flossie takes some eggs to her neighbor and manages to outwit a fox along the way.
<i>Mirandy & Brother Wind</i>	Patricia McKissack, 1988	African American English	Mirandy tries to catch Brother Wind to be her partner for the cakewalk.
<i>Chato Goes Cruisin'</i>	Gary Soto, 2005	Hispanic American	Chato and Novio Boy, two cool cats, win a cruise only to find out that everyone on board is a dog.
<i>Home at Last</i>	Susan Middleton-Elya, 2002	Hispanic American	Eight year old Ana encourages and helps her mother learn English.

Table 1. *Texts Featuring Language Variations*

Maria Perpetua encouraged and guided students to investigate the author's purpose and the context of the story. She also encouraged them to ask why authors might use this language form in their writing and to think about its impact in the story. Students discussed how text can reflect the language of a social, racial, cultural, or linguistic group, and be considered a dialect. At the end of the class, students reached a consensus about the value of authenticity in the use of dialects in diverse texts.

Brittany's notion that reading *Last Stop on Market Street* ((de la Peña, 2015) reminded her of how she felt unsafe in the city caught our attention. We decided to use text sets to avoid reinforcing stereotypes of a certain cultural community. A text set includes books of different genres and covers a variety of aspects of a certain culture. We wanted students to read with purpose so they can "become more conscious and committed to others" (Short, 2019, p. 8) instead of narrowing their views of the world as Chimamanda Adiche warned about with the dangers of a single story (TEDGlobal, 2009). Through reading a collection of books about a given culture, students can potentially develop a holistic view of that culture.

In our classes, we engaged students in exploring text sets of bilingual books (Table 2) and provided opportunities for students to see languages and orthographies from other cultures in these books.

Title	Author/Year	Language other than English	Description
<i>Lakas and the Makibaka Hotel</i>	Anthony Robles & Eloisa de Jesús, 2006	Tagalog	Families come together to fight for each other and for their homes.
<i>Little Rabbit's Questions</i>	Dayong Gan, 2016	Chinese	Little rabbit asks questions and her mother answers each one.
<i>La Muñeca de Elizabeti (Elizabeti's Doll)</i>	Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen, 1998	Spanish	Elizabeti takes care of her doll the same way her mother cares for her new baby brother.
<i>Mango, Abuela, y Yo (Mango, Abuela, and Me)</i>	Meg Medina, 2015	Spanish	Mia helps her grandmother learn English.
<i>Cooper's Lesson</i>	Sun Yung Shin, 2004	Korean	This story is about identity and how friendship can be shared by different generations.
<i>A Place Where Sunflowers Grow</i>	Amy Lee-Tai, 2012	Japanese	Despite living in a Japanese internment camp, families continue to have hope.

Table 2. *Text Set on Bilingual Books About Family*

Reading books showcasing families across varied perspectives enhanced students' knowledge of diverse texts. It also became evident in reading different perspectives that they came to realize the value of other written languages. This was noticeable in Amanda's reflection:

"The different languages give students a chance to practice reading in multiple languages, see their own language or a chance for students to see the difference in written languages across the world the various perspectives would allow students to develop their own thoughts of the world."

In addition to bilingual books, we also used video resources. Huili and Maria Perpetua used *American Tongues* (Kolker & Alviri, 1987) and *Do you speak American?* (Cran, et al., 2005) to introduce English variations and help students reflect on these variations in this country, their own states, and their home communities. Huili further challenged students to think about language as connected to social identity, power, and family history so they could understand that language is more than words, sentences, and grammar. The "correctness" of certain language uses are socially and culturally situated and defined.

Final Reflections

The key to helping students actively engage and learn about diverse texts was to provide them with many opportunities to read widely along with a safe place to raise tensions and exchange ideas. Throughout the semester, we continued to help students learn about the value of diverse texts as they expanded their own multicultural views and developed an inclusive lens for participating meaningfully in a global world. We found in their final course reflections a renewed interest in reading as well as a zest for reading global and multicultural books. Our courses had become a space for students to bring together their questions and understandings of quality diverse books. Students were also challenged to articulate their new understandings and to learn from others about their use of global and multicultural texts.

To sustain their reading access and interest in diverse texts, we also provided students with additional resources where they looked for books according to their needs beyond our courses. Resources included:

- Storyline Online: A web resource of streamed videos of award-winning children's literature featuring actors reading books.
- Notable Books for a Global Society: An award list of outstanding books to help children understand others and their cultures.
- The Collaborative Children's Books Center: This web resource provides research information related to the study of children's and young adult literature.

As part of a learning community of educators, we found ways to work together by sharing ideas around books. Through this, we found commonalities in our teaching as we organized ways to help expand students' knowledge about diverse books. Inspiring students to be open to different perspectives by critically conversing about books helps develop an inclusive lens. By learning and thinking globally we can see our connections to one another.

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