The Cultural Voices of Children's Literature: Web Site Supported Instruction to Unify Theme and Content for Curricular Applications
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ABSTRACT

We present a fundamentally new coding procedure and a two-dimensional Curriculum Tool that reclassifies culturally diverse storybooks for the purpose of teaching cultural understanding. The reclassification results in 9 *cultural voices* - the joining of a book theme and its complexity of cultural content - used as the basis of various teaching approaches linked to the National Standards for the Social Studies and the English Language Arts. Using a formal content analysis, 85 books were analyzed, coded and categorized. Our web site, www.academic.marist.edu/culturalvoices, complements our work and was designed for professional growth and collaboration.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nora Jachym Brakas, Assistant Professor, and Sally Pittman-Smith, Lecturer, teach Literacy Education at Marist College, New York. Nora's research interests include using children's literature as instructional materials for cross-curricular applications. Sally is interested in studying perspectives about historical figures and events from culturally diverse points of view.

Part 1

The interest we developed in culturally diverse children's literature stems from our experiences as classroom teachers and now as professors of teacher education. Teaching both at the elementary and college level enabled us to see the importance of using children's literature to teach the history, values, attitudes, beliefs and customs of different cultures. We saw culturally diverse children's literature as a means to help students make personal connections to the world, relate situations to their own lives, and take a broader view of the world, one that goes beyond their own experiences. Furthermore, we saw the literature as a way to help children develop an understanding of cultures, recognize our common humanity, celebrate our differences, and foster development of social values (Bishop, 1992).

We certainly recognized the educational value of culturally diverse children's literature, appreciated its aesthetics, and frequently used it instructionally. However, after considerable reflection, we gradually became dissatisfied with the way we were using the literature. We felt our teaching approaches tended to be amorphous, without clear structure, and therefore lacked a clear purpose.

This paper and its accompanying web site are the result of a desire to help elementary school teachers, pre-service teachers, and ourselves develop a systematic approach that maps out how one can meet the intended goals of teaching for diversity. To address this problem, we created a coding procedure that reclassifies children's literature and a new Curriculum Tool that is the basis for a variety of useful curricular approaches. In creating the Curriculum Tool and web site, we used what we found in the professional literature and built on it.

Our research revealed college-level textbooks, anthologies of children's literature and articles in research journals often classify children's culturally diverse literature by using one or more of the following mostly one-dimensional organizational patterns.

- Major character attributes. Books are often categorized by the main character's ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, geographic, or regional culture (Ada, 2003; Au, 1993; Day, 1994; Diamond & Moore, 1995; Galda, & Cullinan, 2002; Goforth, 1998; Lindgren, 1991; Norton, 1999; Pang, Colvin, Tran & Barba, 1992; Pratt & Beaty, 1999; Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994; Russell, 1994; Smolen & Ortiz-Castro, 2000).
- Book genre. Authors frequently grouped readings by class such as modern fiction, realistic fiction, biography and folktales (Bishop, 1992; Hillman, 1999; Sutherland, 1996).
- Thematic topics. Books are sometimes clustered by categories such as friendship, celebrations, war stories, and dance (Children's Literature and Reading Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association, 2001; Goforth, 1998; Pratt & Beaty, 1999; Whittake, Salend & Gutierrez, 1997).

We found that literature grouped by patterns are either listed simply by title or described in annotated bibliographies. The bibliographies are not, however, always equal in content. Some give a summary while others, like Pratt and Beaty (1999), analyze the books based on a paradigm. Theirs includes geographic location, and three specific systems, economic, social, and political.

Professional resources also offer checklists and guidelines, some short, some long, to help teachers select reading materials and avoid the pit falls of choosing and using unsuitable literature (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Galda & Cullinan, 2002; Harris, 1996; Norton, 1999; Opitz, 1998-1999; Pratt & Beaty, 1999; Smolen & Ortiz-Castro, 2000). We considered some more helpful than others. We especially liked Cooper's (2000). He recommends that teachers consider four variables when selecting a book (a) its developmental appropriateness, (b) student appeal, (c) literary quality, and (d) cultural and social authenticity.

The Theory Behind the Curriculum Tool

As we sought to grow in our understanding of teaching for diversity through storybooks, we found professional classification systems and selection guidelines a good and necessary place to start when thinking about and choosing books. However, we also realized these systems were not providing us with the cultural information we hoped to find.

- We wanted to find books with identifiable themes, either explicitly or implicitly stated, that relate to teaching for diversity.
- Additionally, we wanted to know the depth, or complexity, of the book's cultural content.

Since this information was not readily available in the literature, we decided to create a process and product that would specifically address our concerns.

Looking at Theme

We recognize the problems concerning book theme.

> Theme as an element of literature is a controversial issue. For instance, some writers claim that their stories do not have a theme. Others make no claim one way or another. Also, theme can be difficult to identify and may be open to substantially different interpretations. (Cramer, 2004, p. 218)

Nevertheless, we do know, as Cramer (2004) states, that children's storybooks are often written to teach youngsters about people's lives and about our common humanity, and these lessons can be conveyed through a book's theme. Galda and Cullinan (2002) state that "Often the theme is the reason authors write in the first place: A story allows them to say what they want to say" (p. 9). Furthermore, we

know that book ancillary information such as an author's note, a preface or an afterword can often clarify the writer's purpose. Nodelman (1996) wrote that a book's theme is "[t]he central idea of the text; the core of meaning that ties it together" (p. 299). We consider the book's overall theme and how it relates to teaching for diversity as the very core and essence of a culturally diverse book.

We know that humans are bound together by universal characteristics; we have the capacity to feel and think; we have the ability to read; we have moral indignation; we grow in our understanding; and we experience pleasure and sorrow. We know we must have this common humanity in order for the concept of "variations" to exit between and among groups of people, as indeed they do. It is this idea of variations that allows us to group all cultures under the umbrella of one major group, humankind. Culturally specific groupings can and have been classified in many different ways. A few examples of these groupings that interest us are those that cluster people by their common regional culture, ethnicity, family structure or religion.

We know books based on a central unifying idea may be written to teach about certain characteristics shared by all humans. Themes such as these are often called, universal. Universal themes include ideas such as personal development, overcoming fears and the need for security. Folktales, fairytales, and fables are known for having universal themes. For instance, *The Egyptian Cinderella*, by Shirley Climo (1989) teaches that good behavior and patience can be rewarded, a theme universal to humanity. Universal themes afford teachers opportunities to discuss with children the characteristics that link people together. Discussions that highlight these aspects are, we believe, a very important part of cultural understanding.

Books can also express themes that are culturally specific. This theme type emphasizes such concepts as beliefs, values, practices and situations that are unique to one, or more than one given culture. For example, the book *Baboushka and the Three Kings,* by Ruth Robbins (1960) has a culturally specific theme that evolved from a Christmas story unique to the Russian Orthodox religion.

Teachers can open discussions about the differences between and the uniqueness of specific cultures by studying books with culturally specific themes. By doing so, instruction can help students understand and perhaps appreciate why and how cultures outside their own may behave and believe differently than they themselves do. Discussions highlighting differences between and among cultures are another important aspect of cultural understanding.

Assuming that the author is successful in writing a clear complete story with an identifiable theme, either explicitly or implicitly stated, the next issue becomes, how will children recognize the author's purpose? We will deal with this through the idea of social construction of knowledge. Readers comprehend text by activating their schema (Anderson, 1994; Rumelhart, 1981) and/or by teachers helping to build schema relevant to the material being read (Bransford, 1994). Schema effects comprehension and individuals bring differing schema to the same reading situation (Anderson, 1994; Bransford, 1994). Readers construct meaning by bridging background knowledge with book content. Importantly, text variables such as concept density, genre, syntax, and abstract ideas influence this construction, as do reader variables like background knowledge and experiences, cognitive development and skills, and beliefs and customs.

Although we know that some authors do write with particular themes in mind, we recognize that interpretation of themes can and will vary among readers (Anderson, 1994; Galda & Cullinan, 2002), and these variations can be minor to major. Differing interpretations would be minor and well-grounded if teachers ensure the following: the story has an identifiable theme, the book is at a comfortable reading level, and the reader has the appropriate anticipatory set. Indeed, all aspects of best practices for reading

instruction should be implemented (see Reutzel & Cooter, 2004).

Given the same assumption about the author's success in writing and the learner's success in reading, if a child's interpretation differs radically from the author's intent then one must consider if it is a well-grounded interpretation. Can we reasonably say that any interpretation of the story by a child is equally sound? If the interpretation is significantly different, based let us say, on an accurate culturally influenced schema, then we could consider the interpretation sound. If this is the case, we see this as a splendid opportunity to help a child accommodate and assimilate new understandings into existing schema. This can be accomplished by helping the reader understand the theme from someone else's point of view. This does not mean that the student will agree or should agree with the theme, like the theme, or live according to the theme. It does mean, however, in any of the above cases that teachers can use the themes of storybooks to teach cultural understanding. However, if the construct of the interpretation is based on an inaccurate or naïve schema, then the interpretation could be considered insufficiently grounded. If this is the case, it is a wonderful opportunity to help children correct misconceptions, add missing concepts and perhaps build a more sophisticated schema.

Let us look at *A Letter to Amy,* by Ezra Jack Keats (1968) to illustrate the points we made above. The following is a summary.

Peter, a very young boy, is about to have a birthday party and wishes to invite his special friend Amy. Although he is concerned about what the boys at his party will think, he does write her an invitation. While he is trying to secretly mail the invitation, he accidentally bumps into Amy and makes her cry and run away. This worries him because he fears she will not come to his party. Amy does eventually come to his otherwise all-boy-party, and one of the boys greets her rudely. Regardless, Peter is very happy to see her and kindly invites her in.

We see the theme of Keats's book as it takes courage to have a friend not readily accepted by others.

Let us say, for example that a second grader interprets the theme as, a silly boy named Peter invites a girl to his birthday party. This could be a well-grounded or insufficiently grounded interpretation of the story depending on the reader. If a child comes from a culture that regularly practices the separation of sexes at certain social events, and has a strong understanding of this cultural practice, then the interpretation could be considered sound. On the other hand, if the child comes up with the same interpretation due not to his or her culture, but to a naïve or inaccurate schema, then the interpretation could be considered insufficiently grounded. An inaccurate and naïve schema might be one that says that boys should play with boys and girls should play with girls. You have to really look at why children interpret as they do; students need to explain their thinking before a teacher can determine the soundness of each response.

In essence, book themes can hold a natural connection to teaching for diversity when the author is successful at illustrating that which is common between and among groups and that which is special in the life and society of a culture. Teachers who use best teaching practices can guide children to making well-grounded interpretations. If interpretations do vary, instruction can focus on expanding or altering cultural schemata. The theme is the book's core and therefore, became an important variable we considered when developing our Curriculum Tool.

Looking at Level of Cultural Content

Banks (1989, 1994-1995), a well recognized researcher and proponent of multicultural reform, presented a curriculum framework including different levels of cultural understanding. These levels, he

stated, form a hierarchy of learning. They include the knowledge, empathy and decision making skills needed to develop and foster one of the basic goals of multicultural education – presenting all children with equal opportunities to learn about themselves and others (Banks, 1994-1995; Banks, Cortés, Gay, Garcia, & Ochoa, 1994; Campbell, 1996; Davidman & Davidman, 2001).

Banks's framework (1989) consists of four levels that can be mixed and blended when developing a curriculum. He explained the four approaches of curricular reform as follows:

- The Contributions Approach. Where "[h]eroes, cultural components, holidays, and other discrete elements related to ethnic groups are added to the curriculum on special days, occasions, and celebrations" (p. 201).
- The Additive Approach. Where "… the addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives [are added to] the curriculum without changing its structure" (p. 201).
- The Transformation Approach. Where "[t]he basic goals, structure, and nature of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, events, issues, problems, and themes from the perspectives of diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial groups" (p. 201-202).
- The Decision Making and Social Action Approach. Where "…students identify important social problems and issues, gather pertinent data, clarify their values on the issue, make decisions, and take reflective actions to help resolve the issue or problem" (p. 202).

Working from Banks's framework, Bieger (1995-1996) illustrated how books, and sometimes the same book, can be used to teach cultural content and concepts at one, or more than one of the four levels of multicultural understanding. Bieger's work catalyzed our thinking, helping us envision how Banks's framework would be instrumental in helping us identify the depth or complexity of a book's cultural content. By analyzing literature with which we were familiar, we found we too could identify levels. We decided we would employ a hierarchy very similar to that of Banks (1989) to identify the cultural content in a book.

We saw the Contributions Approach and the Additive Approach as similar in that they basically focus on cultural facts. We felt that in applying this idea to storybook content, the two categories could be combined and simply renamed as *Contributions or Additive*. This category would describe books having content with cultural facts only and would be considered the foundation level of our hierarchy. By studying the facts presented in books, teachers could help children add information to their existing knowledge base, clarifying or expanding their understanding. Also, when appropriate, we pictured instructors helping students develop metacognitive reading strategies by teaching them how to identify the nature of their learning. Students can be taught to ask themselves, "Am I learning facts?"

We saw books at the *Transformation* level as those including ideas more complex than facts. These books would depict events or beliefs from different cultural perspectives. Content reflecting this level could help students develop understanding, appreciation and empathy of others. For students who are developmentally ready, teachers could foster metacognition by encouraging learners to ask themselves the following two questions: "Am I looking through the eyes of others?" "Have I read or seen why a specific culture or many cultures behave or believe as they do?"

Social Action would describe books with the most complex cultural content. Books including this material would present readers with realistic social issues, problems and solutions that can fall anywhere on a continuum between minor or major concerns. Reading this type of book could enhance students' critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills on the personal and societal levels. Books such as these can help learners answer the question, "Am I seeing how people think about and solve realistic problems?"

In essence, we have described the foundational principles on which our Curriculum Tool is based. It is a 3 by 3 matrix with one axis describing ***Book Theme*** and the other the ***Level of Cultural Content.*** Each of the 9 cells within the matrix categorizes the theme of a story, its main cultural content, and the cultural content's degree of complexity. We call each cell a *cultural voice.* That is, *Cultural Voice = Theme + Cultural Content.* C*ultural voices* are used to guide and plan instruction. (A detailed account of the Curriculum Tool is provided further along in our work.)

Developing an Operational Definition for Selecting Culturally Diverse Books

Before we could code culturally diverse storybooks, we needed to develop an operational definition for selecting them. We knew readings that look at North American parallel cultures are commonly called multicultural literature, and transcultural books (Pratt & Beaty, 1999) and international books are the ones that look at cultures outside the United States. We believe that culturally diverse literature includes these two types and more. Our feeling is that books written about people, their ideas, values, or practices anywhere outside the reader's own experiences can be considered culturally diverse. Additionally, we believe culturally diverse readings include cultures that have been historically excluded, underrepresented or misrepresented in children's literature once used in schools (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Diaz, 2001; Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002). We feel this broader scope affords the reader a wider range of choices to develop a deeper understanding of humanity. In essence, the literature we consider as culturally diverse includes North American parallel cultures, international cultures, and historically underrepresented or misrepresented cultures.

Our view of culturally diverse literature is not only broad in scope, it is personally flexible and, therefore, can be altered to fit the needs of any child's background. We believe that in identifying a culturally diverse paradigm the reader's perspective, based upon cultural background, is fundamental. Teachers need to choose books outside their own personal experiences and those of their students (Davidman & Davidman, 2001; Galda & Cullinan, 2002).

Based on *our* definition, the literature paradigm below represents one possible paradigm, *our* paradigm, and one that should be changed and modified based on the cultural background of the user. (Changes in the paradigm do not effect our Coding Directions or Curriculum Tool. These are two core elements of our project that will be explained in depth later.)

Considering the definitions of various authorities (Davidman & Davidman, 2001; Diamond & Moore, 1995; Grant & Gomez, 1996; Tunnell & Jacobs, 2000) and our own cultural backgrounds, we selected the following ten groups -- their beliefs, attitudes, customs and values -- to represent our literature paradigm:

- The culture of groups living in the United States other than those typically and historically represented as the "idealized American macro culture".
- The culture of groups outside the United States other than Western European (see Pratt and Beaty, 1999, for a list of Western European countries).
- The culture of religious groups other than major Protestant groups and Roman Catholic.
- The culture of regional groups, such as mountain cultures (e.g., southeast Appalachian), river cultures (e.g., the Louisiana bayou Cajuns) and the culture of the rain forest (e.g., the Amazon rain forest).
- The culture of exceptionality, the gifted and the physically and mentally challenged.
- The culture of low socioeconomic status, those people living near, at or below the poverty

level relevant to the time of the story, its setting and the particular culture depicted (e.g., migrant workers and their children, people sponsored by other families, minimum wage earners, welfare recipients, and share croppers).

- The culture of families other than the traditional 'nuclear' family (e.g., single parent, guardian, multi-racial, multi-generational, same sex, blended, adoptive).
- The culture of females, those demonstrating strong or independent roles, or participating in activities that reflect new career avenues (e.g., problem-solvers, leaders, carpenters, plumbers, scientists, inventors).
- The culture of elders, those people two or more generations older than the main character(s) in the book.
- The culture of groups in crisis (e.g., those confronted with war, natural disaster, fatal illness, homelessness and famine).

Using the above-described paradigm, and the previously mentioned checklists and guidelines (e.g., Cooper, 2000), we selected 85 well-written children's books with identifiable themes. Some readings were recommended by a school librarian, some by experienced elementary school teachers, and some personally selected. The books represent a variety of genres and a wide range of developmental levels. The list includes picture books (books where the pictures tell much of the story and the text is limited), picture storybooks (books having very descriptive pictures and comprehensive text), collections of poems, and easy chapter books. Some are award winners, others are not, some are new, others are not, some are well known and others are relatively obscure. Depending on the teacher's objective and the developmental level of the child, books may be used for a read-aloud, a directed reading lesson or independent reading.

We know there are conflicting perspectives concerning authorship and the "authenticity" of cultural content included in books (Harris, 1996). Some people believe that authenticity can only be achieved from an insider's perspective. Others believe that good culturally diverse literature can be written by people inside or outside the culture presented in the book. The key, we believe, is proper in-depth and accurate research. The literature we selected reflects the latter belief.

The Web Site

We invite you, a this juncture, to spend some time visiting our web site at *www.academic.marist.edu/culturalvoices.* A visit will help you become familiar with and quickly access materials that we refer to in the rest of this article. All the information can be found in the category, "Downloads" (listed on the left hand side of each page) and can be printed easily. Before continuing to read, if you prefer to look at hard copies, we recommend that you print out all Downloads. If you would rather not, you can use the zoom feature to enlarge any or all of the documents. You may especially want to do this to read the Curriculum Tool.

Research Method: The Formal Content Analysis

We used a formal content analysis (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980) to systematically and objectively code the 85 culturally diverse books comprising our sample. The process required working back and forth among four sources, the (a) Coding Directions (see Downloads), (b) Coding Chart (see Downloads), (c) book content, and (d) Curriculum Tool (see Downloads).

As we developed the Coding Directions, we revised, deleted or added information to any or all portions of the directions as new characteristics of books were discovered. For example, when a definition in the Coding Directions was found to be troublesome, unclear or limiting, we redefined it and then carefully re-coded all the books again based on the new definition. If needed the Coding Chart and the Curriculum Tool were altered in accordance with the newly defined term.

As the coding process became more precise, it was easier for us to agree when collecting the data. We continued collecting it until 100% agreement was reached. Verification of the coding was completed a second time a year later.

The Curriculum Tool and Coding Process

In order for others to use our coding system, it is important to understand how descriptors, categories and subcategories emerged, what they mean, and how one can apply this understanding to the process of coding books that fit their own literature paradigm. The following sections explain in depth the Curriculum Tool and coding process.

The Concept Map illustrates two target descriptors, their respective categories and subcategories. It is the basic outline upon which the Curriculum Tool is structured and can be downloaded from the web site.

The Curriculum Tool with the results of our completed analysis can also be found in Downloads. It is a matrix of 9 cells that unites the two descriptors ***Book's Theme*** (vertical axis) and ***Level of Cultural Content*** (horizontal axis). As can be seen, each of the 85 books is placed in one of the 9 cells, each cell describing the book's *cultural voice*. (The parenthetical information following each book title will be explained further along in the paper.)

A Major Descriptor: Book Theme

The ***Book Theme***, one major descriptor of the Curriculum Tool, consists of two main categories, one called *Universal* the other called *Culturally Specific*. These two main categories were developed as separate and equal entities; they were not considered a hierarchy. The main category, *Culturally Specific* was further divided into two subcategories, one titled *One Culture* and the other titled *Two or More Cultures Interacting*.

To determine the ***Book Theme,*** we considered two literary elements. The first was the author's overall message, the purpose for writing the book. To do this, we relied more heavily on the text than the artwork. We carefully studied the story itself and any and all prefaces, afterwords, or author's notes. We concentrated more on the text and ancillaries because we found that artwork could be misleading when one is trying to determine the theme. We found that culturally specific pictures do not necessarily indicate a culturally specific theme. For instance, *The Paperboy* by Dav Pilkey (1996) is a book about an African-American boy with a *Universal* theme not a *Culturally Specific* one. In general, we looked for what the author conveyed about society, individuals, living, and the meaning of one's humanity.

We wrote the theme as one declarative sentence. As often as possible we tried to lead with words that described the didactic purpose of the book. For example, words like sharing, determination, perseverance, greed and ignorance were used.

The second aspect we considered when determining ***Book Theme*** was whether the theme was *Universal* or *Culturally Specific*. The category *Universal* defines books with themes that transcend

diversity. Rather than dealing with differences, these books deal with similarities between and among people. Core values, virtues, vices, foibles and struggles shared by humanity are emphasized. Books with *Universal* themes could focus on honesty, loyalty, greed, ignorance and peer pressure.

We defined the category *Culturally Specific* as books with themes that reflect specific cultural beliefs, values, practices or situations. This category is further divided into the two subcategories, books about *One Culture* or those about *Two or More Cultures Interacting*. A book coded as presenting *One Culture* focuses on the beliefs, practices, language, and history of a single culture. A book coded with a theme presenting *Two or More Cultures Interacting* emphasizes one culture interacting with any other culture as an integral part of the story. Here, the key is the relationship between and among cultures.

A Major Descriptor: Level of Cultural Content

Level of Cultural Content, our second major Curriculum Tool descriptor, consists of three main categories, the first *Contributions or Additive,* the second *Transformation,* and the third *Social Action.* These categories were adapted from Banks's (1989) levels of multicultural understanding and unlike the descriptor **Book Theme** form a hierarchy.

The foundation level of the hierarchy is *Contributions or Additive.* This level defines books that present the reader with no more than facts about one culture or many cultures. This is evident when one reads about and sees the customs, languages, traditions, celebrations, foods, clothing and practices of a culture or cultures. To create this level, we combined Banks's two levels -- The Contributions Approach and The Additive Approach -- since we see both approaches as presenting information that adds to knowledge, giving one the basis to develop understanding.

Transformation, the middle level, defines books that present content from an insider's viewpoint, regardless of whether the author is of the insider's culture. The content must include (a) why a culture behaves or believes as it does, and/or (b) how a member of a culture views specific situations or issues. An example of a book at this level is one whose cultural content affords the reader the opportunity to react in a cognitive and affective way to its content. The content may help students develop understanding, appreciation and empathy for others. Books coded at this level may suggest or mention a social problem, however, taking action or suggesting ways to resolve it are not included. An example of a book coded at this level is one with content that emphasizes why some Native Americans value dreamcatchers.

The most complex level, *Social Action,* includes books with content that presents the reader with realistic social issues, problems and solutions. These can fall anywhere on a continuum from minor concerns to major ones. Furthermore, characters can resolve issues internally or externally. For example, discovering personal enjoyment of life or self-reliance may resolve a problem, or receiving family support or help from others may do the same. Like the *Transformation Level,* this level utilizes both the cognitive and affective domains. *Social Action*, however, requires higher order thinking in both domains. We see this level as enhancing critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills at the societal or personal levels.

Nine cultural voices

Uniting **Book Theme** with **Cultural Content** creates *cultural voice*. Each cell on the Curriculum Tool represents one of 9 discrete *cultural voices*. After analysis, a book is recognized as having one of the 9 *cultural voices* and is placed in a cell accordingly. This gives an immediate concrete picture of how a

book relates to teaching for cultural diversity and the complexity of the book's content. This information can then be used in planning for social studies and for the teaching of language arts.

Parenthetical information on the Curriculum Tool

The parenthetical information following each book title on the Curriculum Tool includes the culture(s) represented in the book and then the historical significance of the Book's Theme. The cultures make up our literature paradigm. They are included to help with curricular decisions so teachers can plan units, if they want to, around specific cultures. The ones included on the Curriculum Tool are not all inclusive.

Although the idea of historical significance is not an integral part of the coding system and the Curriculum Tool, we included it as an option in our coding scheme for those who find historical content valuable in making curricular choices. We felt that its inclusion should help teachers select historical materials that depict events from diverse perspectives. A historically significant **Book Theme** describes an event or events, or a person or people, who significantly changed the political, social or economic lives of a given group of people.

The Coding of Mrs. Katz and Tush

Once one has an understanding of the foundational principles of the Curriculum Tool, it is then possible to apply this knowledge to coding a book. We chose *Mrs. Katz and Tush,* a book by Patricia Polacco (1992) to illustrate the coding process. Below we provide a summary.

> Mrs. Katz, a Polish- Jewish elderly woman, lives in the same neighborhood as Larnel, a young African-American boy. Mrs. Katz is lonely and widowed. Larnel brings her a cat to keep her company. Mrs. Katz will gladly take the cat, which she names Tush, but only if Larnel helps her care for it. The three happily spend time together. Mrs. Katz finds comfort sharing her life stories and her customs with Larnel. As time passes they grow to love each other and become part of each other's 'family'. Eventually, she is laid to rest with Larnel performing part of the Kaddish.

The completed Coding Chart for *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) can be found in Downloads along with the Coding Directions. The Coding Chart consists of 6 columns, each having a name in bold print. The six step coding procedure for the book is explained below.

Step 1. We entered the title, author and illustrator of the **Book** in the first column.

Step 2. We carefully read the book a number of times, including any prefaces, afterwords and/or author's notes. Then, we asked ourselves, how we might state the theme in a declarative sentence. For *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) we entered the **Overall Theme** as, "When an elder and child reach out to each other their lives can be enriched in many ways".

Step 3. We analyzed the **Overall Theme** to determine the **Coded Theme**. The inclusion of the word "elder" in our **Overall Theme** indicated the theme was *Culturally Specific*, not *Universal,* because the culture of elders is one of the cultural categories in our literature paradigm. Furthermore, the idea of an elder and a child reaching out to one another suggested *Two or More Cultures Interacting*. These terms were recorded in the appropriate column titled **Coded Theme.** Additionally, we coded the book as not historically significant because the **Theme** does not deal with historically significant content although the book contains some historical facts.

Step 4. We reread the book with a different focus. This time we looked for the **Cultural Content**.

Since a book may contain more than one level, we referred to our focusing questions and definitions (see, Downloads, The Coding Directions) to categorize the content. This process helped us group the cultural content by levels. We summarized the information starting with top-level content and finishing with foundation level information. For *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) we wrote the following, "We learn about a young African-American boy befriending a lonely elderly woman of Polish and Jewish heritage and how their relationship changes both their lives". They eventually become "family" (*Social Action).* We also see through Mrs. Katz' eyes why some Jewish customs are followed (*Transformation).* We hear some Yiddish words and phrases *(Contributions or Additive).*

Step 5. We next entered the highest level of **Coded Cultural Content.** We concluded that this was *Social Action.* We say this because the phrase, a young African-American boy befriending a lonely elderly woman, indicates a realistic social issue -- the isolation of some elders -- and a social action, "befriending."

Step 6. As a final step, we listed and entered the **Culture(s) Included in the Book** based on our literature paradigm. This story includes a smorgasbord of cultures. Mrs. Katz is an elder. She is also a female of Polish-Jewish heritage, and Larnel is an African-American boy.

The Curriculum Tool, shows *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) coded with a ***Book Theme*** of *Culturally Specific, Two or More Cultures Interacting* and a ***Level of Cultural Content*** as *Social Action.* Furthermore, included parenthetically are the cultures represented in the book and the theme's historical label. We now know the book's *cultural voice.* It is classified in a new way and can be used in a variety of curricular approaches.

Conclusion

The *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) example illustrates our coding process along with how the Curriculum Tool works. Before we developed this process we might have looked at *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) as a touching story about an African-American boy and an elder, a Polish-Jewish woman. We might have used the book because the characters are multicultural and it contains information that might be useful teaching Jewish traditions. Now, however, after using the new coding system, we see the story in much more depth and with much more clarity. We see that it contains layers of cultural content, not just facts, and has a theme highlighting intercultural relationships. This broadens and enhances the curricular possibilities for *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992). In Part 2, we discuss some ways the book can be used to teach cultural understanding.

Before discussing these applications, we invite you to once again visit our web site at www.academic.marist.edu/culturalvoices. Try coding several of the books that we have coded and compare your results with ours. To be consistent, follow the Coding Directions very carefully. This practice should allow you to become familiar and comfortable with the coding process. Then, try using our system to analyze some of your own favorites. Record the books on your working Curriculum Tool to identify each book's *cultural voice* and perhaps think about how your understanding of the book may have changed. If you like, submit a book to us of which you are particularly fond (see "Book Submission"). Once you are comfortable with the coding system, you might want to think about how you can establish curricular approaches. We visit this issue next.

Part 2

Curricular Approaches

Using the Curriculum Tool and Web Site to Create Concept-Centered Units

The designs inherent in our Curriculum Tool and web site lend themselves readily to many ways of planning and are reference tools. We will present several avenues you can follow in developing curriculum. There are, however, many more than the ones described here and we encourage you to create your own once you become comfortable with the process.

The following examples of concept-centered units are *Theme* based. To begin, you could simply focus on the concept *Universal* or the concept *Culturally Specific.* The Curriculum Tool clearly identifies books reflecting either idea. Three *cultural voices* are found within each concept with a wide range of content complexity. Doing a search on the web site will provide detailed analysis of each book.

However, perhaps you would want to plan a unit that studies more closely a specific concept subsumed under one *Theme* type. Let us look at how this can be done. Importantly, you need to keep in mind that the examples below were sorted by keying in words in "Overall Theme" found in Book Search on our web site.

A commonly held goal of teaching for diversity is to experience how we connect to one another, that is, learning about our common humanity (Bishop, 1992). A unit of study that appears to be quite fun would be to focus on human "foibles" found in some books that have a *Universal* theme. The web site can help you find the books you want by using Book Search.

For example, words like silly, funny, mistakes, trivial, and ignorance will call up books about foibles. A Korean folktale, *The Chinese Mirror,* by Mirra Ginsburg (1988), illustrates the foible of ignorance and its ramifications. *The Funny Little Woman,* by Arlene Mosel (1972), a Japanese folktale, tells about a character that gets in and out of trouble through thoughtless behavior. The *Chanukkah Tree*, by Eric A. Kimmel (1987), a Jewish tale, talks about the results of a trivial mistake. The *Universal* idea that connects these three stories is that different cultures can laugh at themselves over minor shortcomings. These books all happen to fall in the *Contributions or Additive **Level of Cultural Content*** and therefore make for a unit of study where students learn facts. The study represents one *cultural voice.*

Another goal of teaching for diversity is to highlight the beliefs and practices of a particular cultural group. For instance, a study of this type could include books with *Culturally Specific* themes like *Dreamcatcher,* by Audrey Osofsky (1992); *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* (1978) and *The Gift of the Sacred Dog* (1980), by Paul Goble; *The Mud Pony,* by Caron Lee Cohen (1988); *Where the Buffaloes Begin*, by Olaf Baker (1981); and *Sky Dogs*, Jane Yolen (1990). These six books focus in different ways on the special relationship Native Americans or specific tribes of Native Americans have with nature. Key words like spirit, nature and horses will help you find these books.

Another example of a *Culturally Specific* unit of study would be to use *Working Cotton,* by Sherley Anne Williams (1992); *In Coal Country* by Judith Hendershot (1987); and *The Black Snowman* by Phil Mendez (1989) to highlight aspects of living at a low socioeconomic level. A few key words for this thematic concept are poor and migrant. As can be seen on the Curriculum Tool, these two examples each span two ***Levels of Cultural Content*** -- *Transformation* and *Social Action,* -- making the study of culture more challenging than the one previously described concerning foibles. These two studies each include the same two *cultural voices*.

Teaching for diversity can also include a unit focusing on concepts that are *Culturally Specific* and that involve *Two or More Cultures Interacting.* The impetus of this study is to teach relationships that develop between and among cultures. Such a unit could incorporate ideas like solving problems together, sharing cultural practices, and learning about each other.

One concept subsumed under *Culturally Specific* themes dealing with *Cultures Interacting* is that of "reaching out to others". Key words for this idea include respect, reaching and enriching. *Mrs. Katz and Tush* by Patricia Polacco (1992) is one reading that fits well. Other books with the same message are *Chicken Sunday,* by Patricia Polacco (1992); *The Patchwork Quilt*, by Valerie Flournoy (1985); and *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge,* by Mem Fox (1985). These stories encompass one level of cultural complexity*, Social Action* offering children the opportunity to see how people think critically, problem-solve and take action concerning social issues. These readings encompass one *cultural voice.*

Above we have described only a few of the many approaches one can use to teach concept-centered units. Any avenue taken can be developed further by helping children generalize their learning to a wide-range of different cultural experiences that go beyond the stories they read. Teachers can then encourage students to make personal connections to their world.

Furthermore, with generous use of teacher scaffolding, we believe that students can take more ownership of their learning by using metacognitive strategies for cultural understanding. The discussion below is an illustration of how teachers can use scaffolding to reach this goal*.*

Using Metacognitive Strategies for Cultural Understanding

For our purposes, metacognitive strategies focus on helping children identify the theme and its type, and the level of cultural complexity of any individual book. Students can be guided through this process when teachers model and think-aloud the critical thinking skills and metacognitive strategies needed. For **Book Theme**, the end goal of this process would be for children to independently ask and answer questions such as, "What is the author trying to tell me?" "What is the author trying to say about people and living?" Also, we want them to ask, "Does the theme refer to all humankind, or is it specific to one, or more than one culture?" For **Level of Cultural Content**, we want students to independently ask and answer, "Am I learning facts?" "Am I looking through the eyes of others?" "Am I seeing how people think about and solve problems concerning <u>realistic</u> social issues?" Furthermore, the process includes asking, "how does this learning effect and perhaps change me?"

Using the Curriculum Tool teachers can immediately identify titles with a specific *cultural voice* to teach metacognitive strategies. The web site's Coding Chart will help with book details. As children become confident with analyzing stories with one particular *cultural voice*, teachers can then move onto another.

Mrs. Katz and Tush, by Patricia Polacco (1992) is a good book to examine in studying metacognitive strategies. However, it is one that might be used after children have had substantial practice analyzing books and their learning. The **Book Theme** of *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) is *Culturally Specific, Two or More Cultures Interacting.* To teach children how to recognize the theme, we would encourage them to ask themselves the question, "What is the author trying to say to me?" To answer this we would want learners to say something like this, "A boy and a person who is like a grandmother help each other". Next, we would want them to identify the theme type by asking and answering the following: "Is this about everybody or is this about special groups of people?" We would want the children to realize that it is about two special groups, a child and an elder.

In regards to **Level of Cultural Content**, *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) is coded as *Social*

Action and importantly in this case, it also includes *Transformation* and *Contributions or Additive* information. To begin, in teaching children how to recognize **Levels of Cultural Content**, we would want students to look for all levels present in a book. We would encourage them to ask themselves, "Am I learning facts?" In the case of *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) they could answer in a variety of ways. They could report "yes", a Bubee is a grandmother, Jewish people place a stone on a grave as a sign of respect, and a Seder is a special dinner at Passover time. We would want children to realize that this information is at the *Contributions or Additive* level. Next, we could have students ask themselves, "Am I looking through the eyes of others?" "Am I finding out why people outside my culture believe or behave as they do?" To answer these questions, we would want a child to recognize that *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1992) includes why Passover is celebrated. This information is at the *Transformation* level. Finally, we want children to ask themselves, "Am I seeing how people think about and act to solve social problems?" In this case, we would want students to see that Larnel understands that Mrs. Katz is lonely so he brings her a cat to keep her company and agrees to help her care for it. These acts reflect *Social Action.*

As students identify the content, teachers can help them relate it to their own thinking about cultures and to situations that may have occurred or will occur in their own lives. Importantly, students can then question their beliefs, confirm them and/or change them.

Curricular Approaches and the National Standards for Social Studies

We see the curriculum approaches described above as naturally connecting literature, teaching for diversity and the teaching of Social Studies. Our Curriculum Tool and its *cultural voices* can clearly help teachers plan for and meet the demands of some of the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* prepared by the National Council for the Social Studies (1997). The Curriculum Tool also builds upon resources such as *Children's Literature in Social Studies: Teaching to the Standards* (Krey, 1998), a book that classifies children's literature based on the National Council's thematic strands.

There are ten Social Studies thematic strands developed by the National Council. Our Curriculum Tool seems to fit closely with a number of them. Each thematic strand contains several performance expectations. We will use the first strand, entitled Culture to illustrate the applicability of the Curriculum Tool as a means of identifying books that meet specific national expectations. Our discussion will be for the thematic strand Culture and the performance expectations for the Early Grades.

One performance expectation states that students will "explore and describe similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns" (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997, p. 7). In this statement, the word "explore" suggests gaining knowledge through discovery. The word "describe" implies a basic level of understanding. Any book that can be coded as *Contributions or Additive* could provide the content for this expectation. Books that have *Culturally Specific* themes talk about differences or unique practices of a given group. Those that have *Universal* themes emphasize how we address our needs and concerns in similar ways. Any of the above may prove to be useful in meeting this expectation.

Another performance expectation states students will "give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference;" (National Council for the Social Studies, 1997, p. 7). Books coded as *Transformation* are most likely to be a resource for this expectation. Also, stories coded *Social Action* with a *Transformation* component, like the books *Baseball Saved Us*, by Ken Mochizuki (1993) and *Encounter,* by Jane Yolen (1992) could help teachers prepare students to meet this expectation. Readings that have *Culturally Specific* themes are more likely to address this expectation.

A third performance expectation states students will "compare ways in which people from different cultures think about and deal with their physical environment and social conditions;"(National Council for the Social Studies, 1997, p.7). Stories with content coded as *Social Action* often focus precisely on this. *The Wagon*, by Tony Johnston (1996) and *Amelia's Road*, by Linda Jacobs Altman (1993) are two good examples of books that focus on how people adapt to their living conditions and physical environment. Again, literature with *Culturally Specific* themes would more likely fit this expectation.

These examples of performance expectations in the thematic strand <u>Culture</u> serve to illustrate how our Curriculum Tool can be applied to the Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. Other thematic strands also connect well to our Curriculum Tool.

Curricular Approaches and the Standards for the English Language Arts

Curricula, such as the ones we developed, in which literature is the main vehicle to teach for diversity, not only meet some Standards for Social Studies, but also reflect a number of Standards for the English Language Arts.

We are going to address the Language Arts Standards that most strongly link to our project, using those developed by the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English (1996). A "title" will be used to identify each Standard. The titles can be found on the web site created by Education World (1996). Each Standard's description can be found on that web site and also in the book, *Standards for the English Language Arts* (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996).

Our two curricular approaches, Concept-Centered Units and Using Metacognitive Strategies, satisfy a number of Standards simultaneously. It stands to reason that both approaches help teachers meet Standard 9, entitled, "Multicultural Understanding". To satisfy this Standard, instruction is planned to help "[s]tudents develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles" (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, p. 41). Our whole project helps teachers select books that depict relationships across a spectrum of cultures and complexity of content. Students, for instance, hear different dialects, see different life-styles, and read about how people interact with one another.

Both curricular approaches reflect two other Standards as well, Standard 1 "Reading for Perspective" and Standard 2 "Understanding the Human Experience". Standard 1 recognizes that students should read a range of materials. These reading experiences should help students "… build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment" (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, p. 27). Standard 2 deals with students "… build[ing] an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience" (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, p. 29). Studying *Universal* or *Culturally Specific **Themes,*** an integral part of both curricular approaches, naturally reflects the content of these Standards. The basic focus is to learn about and respond to that which is common between and among groups or that which is special in the life and society of a culture. Since ***Level of Cultural Content*** is infused in these studies, students learn facts about themselves and others, view situations from the perspective of others, and identify and react to <u>realistic</u> social issues.

One of the two curricular approaches-- Teaching Metacognitive Strategies for Cultural Understanding -- meets Standard number 3. This Standard focuses on strategy instruction and comprehension and is titled "Evaluation Strategies." Specifically, it requests that "[s]tudents apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts.…" (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996, p. 31). The metacognitive approach teaches students to identify, through critical thinking, the type of information found in books. Students, with the help of their teacher, learn how to identify facts, recognize the viewpoint of others, and enhance critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills at the societal and personal levels. To one degree or another, students react to their learning in a cognitive and affective manner.

The two curricular approaches we described above deal with analyzing and responding to literature. The modes in which one can respond are numerous and varied and have not been dealt with in our paper, since that was not our purpose. However, when teachers choose different ways for their students to respond to the literature, such as writing or using technology, more of the Language Arts Standards can be realized.

The Web Site

In Part 1 of this article, we demonstrated how books are classified by unifying theme and content to determine their *cultural voice* and referred you to the web site to practice coding some of your own favorites. Look again at our interactive web site, found at www.academic.marist.edu/culturalvoices , to find books that fit particular curricular approaches that interest you

In-depth analysis of all books within one *cultural voice* can be located by entering the two target descriptors of that *voice.* One *voice* could be *Universal* with *Contributions* or *Additive;* another, *Universal* with *Social Action;* and a third, *Culturally Specific - One Culture* with *Transformation.*

On the other hand, entering a single descriptor from the Curriculum Tool can access analysis of a group of books crossing several *voices*. For example, if one entered only *Universal,* information located would span three *cultural voices*.

Furthermore, other searches could focus on values, virtues, vices or cultures. In this case you might want to click on the ? for key words to use in your search. This search type will often, but not always, group books spanning many *voices*. The manipulation of the information on the Coding Chart will allow you to quickly access readings so you can begin organizing for specific curricular approaches.

Conclusion

By identifying the *cultural voices* of children's literature, we are able to rethink curricular approaches. Since books are now kept intact rather than viewed by a single, one-dimensional characteristic, instruction can provide more in-depth opportunities for students to personally connect with the many cultural aspects of stories. Our project provides a systematic means for elementary teachers, pre-service teachers, and ourselves to rethink what we want to present when teaching for diversity.

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