



Multicultural Literature for Children: Applications of Stories

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 15 September 2025	From a cultural-oriented perspective, stories function not only as vessels for preserving cultural heritage but also as pathways for shaping identity and fostering intercultural understanding. This approach underscores that narrative texts are rooted in and reflective of their broader social, historical, and cultural contexts. Beyond supporting the development of basic literacy skills, culturally oriented children's literature plays a critical role in cultivating empathy, encouraging critical thinking, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. Accordingly, this article aims to examine the role of stories in advancing culturally oriented children's literature, with particular attention to their potential in supporting cultural identity construction, enhancing intercultural understanding, and transmitting values and traditions across generations. Furthermore, on the basis of this exploration, this article develops the concept of Multicultural Literature for
Corresponding Author: Yi-Huang Shih	Children as a response to contemporary educational needs for cultural understanding and inclusivity.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of education affects a country's development and success, and a key component of an effective education system is the cultivation of high-quality teachers. The quality of education often depends on the quality of teachers, and teachers' professional development is closely linked to teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Wang & Shih, 2022). With regard to student learning outcomes, children's literature is specifically designed for children and is typically characterized by simple language, rich illustrations, and engaging storylines. Children's literature is not merely a source of entertainment for young readers but also an essential medium for transmitting cultural values, traditions, and worldviews. From a cultural-oriented perspective, stories function not only as carriers of cultural heritage but also as pathways for shaping identity and fostering intercultural understanding. This perspective emphasizes that narrative texts

are deeply rooted in and reflective of their broader social, historical, and cultural contexts. Beyond the development of basic literacy skills, culturally oriented children's literature plays a crucial role in cultivating empathy, encouraging critical thinking, and promoting respect for cultural diversity (Applebee, 1978; Durkin, 1966, 1970; Shih, 2024a, 2024b; Ye & Shih, 2021). As Bishop (1990) metaphorically proposed through the concept of "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors," children's literature can serve as a "window" into other cultures, a "mirror" that reflects one's own cultural experiences, and a "sliding glass door" that enables readers to cross cultural boundaries. Similarly, Banks (2004) emphasizes in his framework of multicultural education that education should not only foster respect for cultural diversity but also cultivate critical consciousness and democratic participation. Together, these theoretical perspectives highlight that culturally oriented children's literature is not merely a vehicle for transmitting

knowledge and values but also a vital educational resource for promoting cultural understanding and social inclusion. Accordingly, this study explores the role of stories in advancing culturally oriented children’s literature, focusing particularly on their potential to support cultural identity construction, enhance intercultural understanding, and transmit values and traditions across generations. Furthermore, based on this exploration, the paper develops the concept of Multicultural Literature for Children as a response to contemporary educational needs for cultural understanding, critical consciousness, and inclusivity (Banks, 2004; Bishop, 1990; Bista, 2012; Nikolajeva, 2014).

2. MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Multicultural children’s literature is grounded in the principles of multicultural education. Through literary works, it presents the cultural experiences, values, and ways of life of different groups, thereby helping children develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity during the reading process. Bishop (1990) proposed the metaphor of *mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors*, suggesting that literature should enable children to see reflections of their own culture (mirrors), to glimpse the worlds of others (windows), and to step into and experience different lives (sliding glass doors). Such literary functions not only support the construction of cultural identity but also expand intercultural understanding and empathy. At the same time, Banks’ (2004) theory of multicultural education emphasizes that education should cultivate students’ democratic citizenship, encouraging them to critically examine and challenge prejudice and inequality in society. From this perspective, multicultural children’s literature is not merely a reading resource but also an important avenue for advancing educational equity, social justice, and cultural dialogue.

3. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: THE APPLICATION OF STORIES IN MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Stories play a crucial role in children’s multicultural literature. They are not only vehicles for reading and imagination but also essential pathways for children to encounter, understand, and appreciate diverse cultures. In early

childhood education, stories provide young learners with joy, laughter, and lasting memories. Since the emergence of human language, storytelling has been an integral part of social life, serving purposes such as cultural transmission, entertainment, religious communication, and educational practice. Beyond amusement, stories preserve and convey human history and experience, functioning as an alternative “lullaby” that accompanies children’s growth and development. Childhood stories often leave profound and enduring impressions, shaping values, imagination, and identity. Moreover, storytelling serves as a medium through which adults educate the younger generation while simultaneously expressing love and care. It strengthens the bond between adults and children, fostering intimacy and mutual connection. From the perspective of multicultural children’s literature, Bishop (1990) conceptualizes stories as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.” Stories act as mirrors when they reflect children’s own cultural experiences, affirming their identities; as windows when they provide opportunities to observe and learn about cultures different from their own; and as sliding glass doors when children are invited to step into and imaginatively participate in worlds beyond their immediate reality. Through these functions, storytelling not only enriches children’s cultural awareness but also cultivates empathy, respect, and a sense of belonging in a diverse society (Bishop, 1990; Li, 2014; Sipe, 2008; Wu & Wei, 2007).

In the selection of multicultural literature for children and young adults, educators and researchers often grapple with two major controversial issues—authority and authenticity—that concern how cultural experiences are represented in writing. A critical question arises: What type of author can accurately portray the lived realities of minority cultures? Must the work be written by a member of that particular ethnic group to ensure authenticity, or does the meaning and validity of the work change when authored by an outsider? While insider authorship is frequently associated with greater authority and lived experience, outsider authorship may also contribute meaningfully if grounded in rigorous research, cultural consultation, and respectful representation. The debate highlights the importance of critical engagement with multicultural texts to discern whose voices are centered, whose

are marginalized, and how cultural narratives are constructed. Finally, in practical pedagogy, teachers can translate these theoretical insights into meaningful classroom practices. One effective approach is theme-based reading, selecting multicultural storybooks on themes such as family, festivals, food, and friendship, and guiding children to compare cultural similarities and differences. Teachers may also employ role-playing and dramatization, enabling children to embody story characters and experience cultural contexts from others' perspectives. Additionally, incorporating legends and folktales of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples and Hakka communities not only preserves local cultural heritage but also exposes children to the diverse cultural fabric of Taiwanese society. Such practices bridge theory and application, demonstrating how storytelling can serve as both a pedagogical tool and a vehicle for multicultural education, ultimately fostering empathy, respect, and cultural literacy among young learners (Bista, 2012; Shih, 2020, 2022, 2024a, 2024b). Finally, teachers can implement Indigenous picture book teaching, for example, by selecting works such as *Akay Grandpa*, a picture book that integrates local plant knowledge and cultural memory. Through reading, students are guided to understand the cultural meanings behind words and symbols, and further discuss the relationship between humans and nature." *Akay Grandpa* is a bilingual picture book that combines the Roman alphabet (A–Z) with knowledge of plants from Lanyu (Orchid Island). Narrated from the perspective of a grandson, the story recalls the companionship and teachings of his grandfather—akay (the Tao word for grandfather)—and transforms his wisdom of the mountains and forests into lessons of the alphabet and plant stories. As readers journey through the alphabet, they are gradually introduced to Lanyu plants whose names begin with each letter from A–Z, experiencing through words and illustrations the Tao people's wisdom of living in harmony with nature. This is not merely an alphabet-learning book; it is also a woven journey of culture, language, and ecology. It allows children, while reading, to feel the memory of elders, the strength of the land, and the importance of protecting the environment.

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