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this.)

- Are we focusing the right kind of attention on the pictures in a story? I thought we were supposed to teach children to *enjoy* the pictures and *read* the print.
- A book is a book. I wonder why so many in our field are more concerned with the content of books than the process of reading.
- Why are we assessing the *quality* of a reader's predictions? If prediction is intended to put the reader in a stance of reading to confirm or reject the prediction, quality doesn't matter. What if the reader made a wild, i.e. off topic, prediction and then found his prediction to be dead wrong?

(I would call that reading comprehension.)

- I believe meta-cognition is an impediment to reading. If we are expecting a reader to think about the thinking she is doing while reading, how will she ever get lost in the book? Isn't it possible to think *too much* while reading?

Lest you believe I went overboard with my questioning and wondering, we are all in the same boat. I, too, am discomforted by my own questions. To be in a steady state of comfort, however, is just that—it's comfortable. Learning is a state of disequilibrium that, I believe, should be experienced daily by every one who teaches. Try it. After all, birds of a feather

Beyond *Brown vs. The Board of Education*: A Legacy of African American Children's Literature

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The notion that public schools in America, although *separate*, were *equal*, was a fallacy from the beginning. The *Brown* decision (1954) marked the beginning of an era in which specific attention acknowledged and addressed the effects of statutory segregation in America's public school classrooms.

Evidence supporting this assertion is found in books, media, and in most literary publications of the era immediately preceding the *Brown* decision. One easily identifiable practice stemming from the racist views that permeated American education (even in those places where segregation was not legislated) is found in the texts that were published and purchased

for use in our nation's classrooms. America's public schools used texts and instructional materials that either presented pejorative and negative images of African Americans or simply omitted them entirely from materials that children used on a daily basis. These were the texts used to teach children about themselves and the world around them.

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Now, 50 years later, the impact of separatism and inequity to quality public education continues to affect some students. This can be seen in the performance of children whose parents were victimized by segregated schools and access to quality education. Current reports documenting the disparity between literacy and numeracy rates of Whites and non-whites attest to the consequences of unequal access to quality education in America's classrooms. Rod Paige, the U.S. Secretary of Education, lauded the *No Child Left Behind Act* in a speech given on May 14, 2004. He revealed that nationally, fourth grade African Americans rank 28 percentage points behind their white counterparts in reading achievement.

Improved reading achievement for minorities has long been an issue of concern for reading researchers. The issue began to receive more concerted interest in the 1950s and 1960s. As early as 1966, pre-convention institutes of the International Reading Association highlighted reports that addressed reading instruction for the "disadvantaged." Although decades have passed, this issue has not been satisfactorily resolved. An array of studies and reports not only assesses reading and writing achievement for all students, but also has continued to focus attention on the achievement and performance of the nation's growing population of ethnic and cultural minorities in public schools. Biannually, the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) publishes *The Nation's Report Card* (NCES, 2005). Although the NAEP reports that gains are being made, they also report the alarming disparities that continue to exist between reading and writing achievement scores of African Americans and White students in our nation's classrooms. More recently the *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) legislation seeks to effectively rid the nation of this gap that exists between achievement levels of many urban and rural school children. NCLB is designed to *change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap* (see, for example, Paige, 2001).

Traditional methods of reading instruction have been minimally successful with large numbers of poor minority children. Research has continued to examine alternative models and approaches to reading instruction. Some models embrace integrated holistic approaches to instructional strategies, content, text materials, as well as respect for the cultural differences of minority learners.

The *Brown decision* in 1954, along with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, created a heightened awareness of the plight of many children in the nation's schools. The issues that surfaced fueled many of the changes in literature that is currently available to children and adults. In the late 1960s some significant changes began to occur. A number of these changes were reflected in literature published during this time and in children's books selected to receive prestigious American Library Association Awards.

In 1963 the Caldecott Medal was awarded to Ezra Jack Keats, author and illustrator of *The Snowy Day*. This was the first book featuring an African American child to receive the award. The Newbery Honor Award went to African American authors Julius Lester in 1969 for *To Be a Slave* and 3 years later in 1972, to Virginia Hamilton for *The Planet of Junior Brown*. Then in 1975 Virginia Hamilton became the first African American author to receive the Newbery Medal for her book, *M. C. Higgins the Great*. Hamilton was followed by Mildred D. Taylor winning the Newbery Medal in 1977 for her work, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Since 1977 the only other African American to receive the Newbery Medal is Christopher Paul Curtis in 2000 for his novel, *Bud, Not Buddy*. In 1969, to honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the American Library Association established The Coretta Scott King Award that annually awards medals to African American authors and artists for excellence in writing and illustrating books for children. These are just a few examples of quality literature providing authentic and accurate portrayals of African Americans that have been written for and about children.

As works by African American authors have proliferated and been accepted by major publishers, other African Americans have received honors for their work from other children's literature award organizations.

Literature is a valuable cultural commodity that acts as a mediator between children, their cultural knowledge, and socialization by adults. Literature can also serve as an impetus for improved educational achievement as students learn that reading is enjoyable. Viewed from this perspective, children's and young adult literature's purpose is:

- to transmit values and attitudes,
- to provide opportunities for dialog between and within cultural and ethnic groups,

- to serve as a vehicle reflecting social and personal reality,
- and finally, as a socializing agent, revealing who and what is valued in society and what is acceptable behavior.

Literature can offer teachers excellent opportunities to effect different approaches to teaching and learning, especially when that literature presents an "inside view" of a culture, or when authors, because of their own ethnicity, express their heritage through their writings. Many African American children's authors and illustrators have stated that they portray children in authentic settings and illustrations that reflect their images and experiences.

Conclusion

It is vitally important that the books teachers select for children foster an enjoyment of reading. This, in turn, will support reading skill development and overall school achievement. Literature written for and about African American children should reflect the same characteristics as all other quality literature. The goals and benefits that are realized from experiencing quality literature are generalizable to all children. Literature can and should expand children's horizons through vicarious experiences. This rich legacy of African American children's literature that is widely available and highly acclaimed can trace its roots, in part, to the *Brown decision* of 1954.

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