

Diversity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Caldecott Books: Unintended Messages and Silenced Voices  
Karyn Gomez, Ed.D. and Lee Ann Mc Nerney, Ph.D., Eastern Oregon University  
Oregon Chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education 2009 Conference

## Introduction

- Today's classrooms are becoming more diverse
- Research question: How do 21<sup>st</sup> Century Caldecott Medal and Honor books reflect the diversity found in current American society?
- Critical examination of 21<sup>st</sup> century Caldecott Award and Honor books for intended and unintended messages about diversity
  - Rationale for selection of Caldecott books
    - Reviewed and selected by a panel of experts
    - Award is based on illustrations, and illustrations are influential in the messages that are communicated
  - Limited to 2000-2008 award and honor winners in order to use the most updated literature that may have kept up with societal changes

## Theoretical framework

- Recent study of Caldecott and best selling picture books found that gender stereotyping is still prevalent in children's literature (Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006)
- Children's literature depicted those who were not European or European American as invisible or depicted the marginalized populations in negative or stereotypical ways (Aoki, 1993; Nieto, 1997)
- The portrayals of the marginalized were inaccurate and misrepresented the real picture (Mendoza & Reese, 2001)

## Method

- Two researchers read 38 Caldecott award winners and honor books for the years 2000-2008
- Book texts and illustrations were analyzed for Ethnic Diversity, Gender Role Depictions, Depictions of People with Disabilities, and Depictions of People in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Community
- Texts and pictures were further analyzed for potential biases

## Results

- Ethnic Diversity
  - Main character ethnicity by book
    - 9 books: Ethnic Diversity not applicable because animals were the only characters
    - 15 books: Exclusively White [a person from a European country or a North American whose native language is English and especially whose culture or ethnic background is of European origin (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008)]main characters. Three are biographical texts.

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- 5 books: Exclusively African American main characters. 4 are biographical texts.
- 4 books: More than one ethnicity represented in main characters
- 3 books: Main characters are animals and secondary characters are White
- 1 book: Main character is an animal and secondary characters are White and African American
- 1 book: Main character is an animal, secondary characters are White, and tertiary characters are animals
- Asian, Hispanic, Native American, and other cultures were not represented in main characters or secondary characters
- Illustrations of ethnicity other than White and African American
  - 2 books: An apparently Asian child is depicted
  - 1 book: Two apparently Hispanic children are depicted
- Gender
  - 19 of the 38 books were not analyzed for gender stereotyping for one of the following reasons: the book was of an historical nature and the researchers did not feel it was appropriate to evaluate gender roles for historical time periods, the gender of the animal characters was unspecified, or there were no main characters
  - 19 remaining books included in the analysis
    - 16 included some form of gender role stereotype
      - Women were depicted in domestic roles such as caregiver for children or cooking for the family and as teachers of young children
      - Men were shown wearing professional clothing such as suits and ties or as a family leader sitting at the head of the table.
    - 10 included some form of non-stereotypical gender roles.
      - A woman is portrayed barbecuing while the man sits at the picnic table
      - A boy is seen carrying food to the table at Thanksgiving time
      - A father takes his daughter to the Laundromat to do the laundry while the mother stays home to read
  - Main Character Analysis
    - 17 books with male main characters
    - 10 books with female main characters
    - 4 books with both male and female main characters
    - 4 books where there were no main characters

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- Book Title Analysis
  - 14 books with males names or main characters
  - 7 books with female names or main characters
  - 1 book with both male and female characters
  - 16 books with gender neutral titles
- Author/Illustrator gender analysis
  - 23 male authors/16 female authors
  - 30 male illustrators/9 female illustrators
- Depictions of People with Disabilities
  - In 1 book, a character is visually impaired because he lost an eye in an accident and wears an eye patch
  - In 2 books, elderly women are depicted with canes
- Depictions of People in the LGBTQ Community: none apparent
- Potential Bias/Stereotyping
  - Religious: Judeo-Christian religious tradition was evident in 5 books. No other religious traditions were evident.
  - Ethnic
    - The European Jewish culture from the early 1900s is depicted in one book (*Joseph Had a Little Overcoat*) as poor and rural. The representation of the Jewish characters was similar to the characters depicted in the American musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.
    - In one book, a potential case of ethnic stereotyping is shown because an African American woman is depicted wearing a bandana over her hair.
  - Body Image
    - In one book, an overweight president is depicted as morbidly obese and gluttonous
    - In other books, elderly women are depicted as overweight, hunched over, gray haired, and using canes
    - Main characters who are human are generally depicted as thin or with average proportions
    - Overweight people are not depicted as main characters
  - Family Unit
    - In all books depicting family units, the families consist of male and female parents plus one or more children or extended family units with male and female couples
    - There are no same sex couples depicted in any of the stories

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- No other alternative family units are obvious (domestic partnerships, multi-generational families, single parent families, etc.)

Conclusions from the Research

- Positive progress
  - 10 books include non-stereotypical gender role images
  - Two books include families that appear to be multiracial
- Areas for further growth
  - Caldecott award winners and honor books from 2000-2008 as a group do not accurately reflect the diversity found in current American society
  - Gender stereotyping is still prevalent in this canon of children's literature
  - Non-stereotypical gender representations are found less frequently than stereotypical gender representations
  - Marginalized populations are mostly invisible in the literature analyzed

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Bibliography of Caldecott Winners and Honor Books can be found at

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecottmedal.cfm>