
Teaching world literature in the primary school: a discussion paper

QCA Reading Differences project

March 2006

Contents

Part A: A rationale for introducing children to world literature	3
Part B: Access to world literature for children	5
Part C: Sources of world literature for children	7
Part D: How we read: critical approaches to world literature for children	10
Part E: Teaching a broader literature curriculum: how the Reading Differences project can help	14
Part F: The texts themselves: the four categories	16
Part G: Conclusion: A more inclusive consciousness	18
Bibliography	20

We are very grateful to Professor Myra Barrs for her invaluable contribution to this project, particularly in the preparation of this discussion paper.

Part A: A rationale for introducing children to world literature

What is 'reading differences'?

QCA's Reading Differences project aims to help primary teachers introduce children to literature from other countries. It is about ways of reading as well as about what to read. It is about reading different texts and reading texts differently.

By reading *different texts*, we mean ones whose origins beyond the UK give them a particular interest and appeal. These books are likely to contain experiences, voices, cultural references and social patterns that are new and fascinating to children, as well as offering new perspectives on familiar themes.

By suggesting that we read *differently*, we mean that ways of reading may sometimes need to change if we are to make sense of what is distinctive in these texts. We need to read in an especially receptive way, responding to the cultural and linguistic qualities in the books and relating them to what we know about their countries of origin. How to develop this way of reading is one of the main concerns of the project.

Links to the national curriculum

The English national curriculum requires the study of texts from 'a variety of cultures and traditions' at all key stages. This requirement is developed through specific teaching objectives, from 'stories and poems from a range of cultures' in year 1 to 'investigating a range of texts from different cultures' in year 5.

This requirement is intended to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the distinctive qualities of literature from different traditions, and to be able to make connections and comparisons between texts from different cultures. The programme of study for key stage 3 makes this line of work clear, stating that children should be taught:

- to understand the values and assumptions in the texts
- the significance of the subject matter and the language
- the distinctive qualities of literature from different traditions
- how familiar themes are explored in different cultural contexts (for example how childhood is portrayed)
- to make comparisons between texts from different cultures.

As well as stressing the importance of selecting texts from other countries, this aspect of the programmes of study also highlights the need to teach specific interpretative skills.

The primary national strategy reflects the requirements of the national curriculum programmes of study, for example including 'myths, legends and fables from a range of cultures' and 'novels, stories and poems from a variety of cultures and traditions' in the year 5 framework, and recommending that children be taught to 'consider patterns of relationships, social customs, attitudes and beliefs'.

Diversity and inclusion

An international approach to children's literature goes alongside an inclusive approach to the cultures reflected in British classrooms, where one pupil in eight now comes from an ethnic minority background.

In recent years the DfES, QCA and other government bodies have explicitly recognised the importance of appropriate curriculum content for promoting the learning of children from ethnic minorities. A DfES report¹ on raising the achievement of ethnic minorities states:

Both the content of the curriculum and the skill with which it is delivered are key to engaging children and young people in learning. This can be particularly important for children and young people from minority ethnic groups who may not see their culture, history and values reflected in their school experience.

Literature that represents the cultural heritage and experience of ethnic minority groups does not, of course, speak only to those minorities. Multicultural and international literature has just as much to say to indigenous groups as to ethnic minority groups.

All our futures: looking ahead

In 1999 the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), produced the report *All our futures: creativity, culture and education*. In this discussion of the future of creativity and the arts in schools, the committee argued that 'the world that young people live in and will inherit is multicultural' and that it should be a priority for schools to take account of cultural diversity in planning the curriculum: 'As a matter of urgency education must help young people...to engage with and respect cultural perspectives different from their own.'

The NACCCE committee thought that the arts could be a cultural bridge between young people from different communities and cultures. In the words of the report:

The real task is to enable young people, as far as possible, to understand other cultures from the inside. Seen from their own cultural perspectives, the ideas and patterns of behaviour of other cultures can seem strange. Young people need to have insight into other ways of living and understand the ideas that give them meaning and significance.

The English 21 project also focused on the curriculum of the future; it was set up to 'ask the questions to shape the future of English'. One of the questions was 'How should our literary heritage be defined given the changes in our society?'

The project found strong support among the organisations it consulted for schools to tackle a wider range of serious literature from different cultures and countries, both in English and in high-quality translation.

The Reading Differences project is part of this more general move to shape a broader and more inclusive curriculum for schools in the future. It presents a model of an expanded literature curriculum for the primary school. In this paper we look at:

- the arguments for broadening the range of literature available to children (Part B)
- the sources of suitable texts (Part C)
- critical discussions of international children's literature (Part D)
- the range of resources and teaching approaches that the Reading Differences project offers teachers (Part E)
- the rationale behind the categories of books selected by the project (Part F).
- the project in the context of a growing global movement for cultural exchange (Part G).

¹ *Aiming high, raising achievement, DfES, 2003*

Part B: Access to world literature for children

Ideals of internationalism

We still need to extend the range of books we read with children which present a cultural context that is unfamiliar. In this way we not only reduce the unfamiliarity but also make what is familiar less stable, more inclusive of difference.

Margaret Meek Spencer

Reading stories set in other cultural contexts opens windows on to a wider world and enables children to connect with other cultural experiences by (in Louise Rosenblatt's words) 'living through' them. Aesthetic experiences of this kind promote cultural understanding and counter stereotypes. Powerful experiences of exploring difference can also give us different perspectives on our own experiences and cultures. As Margaret Meek Spencer implies, reading other cultures makes the strange familiar but also opens up the possibility of looking at the familiar in new ways.

This argument for broadening the range of books available to children is linked to the ideals of internationalism that inspired organisations like the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), founded in 1953 by Jella Lepman. One of Lepman's aims, after the Second World War, was to promote understanding among the world's children in the cause of peace. IBBY's stated purpose is 'to support and unify those forces in all countries connected with children's book work: to encourage the production and distribution of good children's books, especially in the developing countries.'

The movement towards internationalism in children's books grew in the postwar period; from the 1960s to the 1980s there was a marked rise in the number of translated children's books available.

Access to world literature for children is narrowing

Many people believe that there are more relevant and culturally diverse books now – but are there? Many ethnic groups within British society are underrepresented or absent, whether as characters in or as writers and illustrators of children's books, for example the Arabs and the Chinese...it is rare to find any British published children's books featuring Chinese people and culture, especially written by authors of Chinese origin.

Ann Lazim

In England today fewer children's books that originate from other countries are being published. The golden age of the postwar years is over, and the number of children's books in translation has fallen. World literature, like world music, is a growing part of the adult book market, but access to world literature is much narrower for children than it is for adults.

As Philip Pullman points out in his foreword to the book guide *Outside in: children's books in translation*, this partly reflects 'the astonishing success of the English language...which has wandered all over the place and now finds itself in daily use in the mouths of millions of people who have never been to England in their lives.' But Pullman argues that a disturbing paradox is operating: the status of English as a world language is actually contriving to isolate children in the UK from the literature of other countries. So many books are now written *in* English, including many books from other countries, that there is less perceived need for books in translation. That very phenomenon may lead to complacency, or worse, about the importance of reading literature from different cultures.

In the 1970s in the UK, books foregrounding the cultural heritages of children from families of overseas origin in British schools began to be published in greater numbers. Information about resources was widely shared through INSET courses, booklists and articles. The heightened awareness of the need for literature from children's countries of origin stimulated the publication of children's books from these countries. But much of this pioneering work has not been built on.

Even in the area of folk tale, there are gaps to be filled. Booktrust's recent guide to traditional tales, *Folk and fairy tales: a book guide*, reveals the Eurocentricity of children's publishing in this field; relatively few books from outside Europe were available for inclusion in the guide.

Translation as a window on the world

The only way that I and other English-speaking people will realistically ever be able to meet and make friends with people from elsewhere is through the patient and skilful work of those often invisible and usually unsung heroes of literature, the translators.

Philip Pullman

Translated literature can introduce us to the work of skilful and experienced writers from all over the globe. At the same time it introduces us to 'the stranger who is also our neighbour' (Marcoino, 'The fading of French nationality?') making us aware of different ways of living and being.

In 1996 the Marsh Award for children's literature in translation was set up to counter what the trustees termed 'literary xenophobia'. Since it was founded it has done much to extend awareness of international children's literature. In that time there has been a steady increase in the number of children's books translated into English and published in Britain. But in a recent press release, the award's administrators estimated that even now only one per cent of British children's books originates from other countries. They question whether some of the most popular enduring translated classics (Heidi, Pinocchio, most fairytales, Asterix, Tintin and *The Diary of Anne Frank*) would be spotted and made available today.

The recently published book guide *Outside in: children's books in translation* is another positive step towards raising the profile of translated literature. Yet the editor of *Outside in* notes that 'there should be many, many more countries represented here.... There are a great many wonderful books out there waiting to be brought to a UK audience.' She argues that more translated books could become commercial successes if British publishers promoted them as energetically as they do books by British authors. The curious British wariness around literature in translation is unknown in many other countries, as Lene Kaaberbol (author of *The Shamer's Daughter*) points out in her article in *Outside in*: 'In Denmark, where I live, a 'Literature in Translation section [in a bookshop] would be nonsensical – it would comprise more than half the shop.'

Most children's books from other countries published in English are currently picture books: pictures books cross language barriers more easily. But the role of the 'invisible translators' is fundamental in providing access to world literature for children. High-quality translation is important; books that are clumsily translated and written in stilted 'translationese' are not worth offering to children. The best translations of children's books, like those selected by the Marsh Award for children's literature in translation, are skilful renderings of the originals. No computer could ever do the job of interpretation that translators do. Gillian Lathey points out that 'translation doesn't just happen in a straightforward word-for-word manner: there is clearly a filtering consciousness at work making linguistic choices, adapting the context of the original, aligning it with models in the receiving culture, omitting text or adding explanations.' Good translations can convey the flavour of a story's original language and culture while creating a version that works in the receiving language.

Part C: Sources of world literature for children

European literature

Most of the currently available children's literature in translation comes from European countries, and the majority of children's literature classics in translation are also from Europe. Some of these classics date back to the 19th century, which saw the publication of books such as Grimms' fairytales, Hans Christian Andersen's stories, Heidi and Pinocchio. This was a time when, in many European countries, literature for children was just becoming established as a new and separate branch of literature.

In the first half of the 20th century many more European children's classics were translated into English, including *Emil and the Detectives*, *Babar*, *The Little Prince*, *Asterix*, *Tintin*, the *Moomins* and *Pippi Longstocking*. Significantly, several of these favourite books are picture books or books whose text is highly illustrated.

Some European writers and illustrators for children are now known throughout Europe and beyond: writers like Anne Holm (Denmark), Jostein Gaarder (Norway) and Roberto Innocenti (Italy) have introduced readers from many countries to their imagined worlds.

The older European children's classics reflect a bygone Europe, before political and social changes led to shifting boundaries and movements of peoples. But some contemporary writers such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Germany) and Daniel Pennac (France) are consciously writing about these demographic and political changes in their books for children.

A changing Europe

Changing political boundaries mean that Europe is becoming bigger and more diverse. In addition, economic migration in Europe is changing European societies and is being reflected in European children's literature, some of which finds its way to the UK.

In discussing the work of the German children's author Rafik Schami, originally from Syria, Lathey asks:

To which national literature then – given his expressions of Arabic traditions and concerns – does Schami's work belong? The inadequacies and limitations of national categorisation are as permanent when discussing this Syrian-German as they [are] in relation to the artistry of Gayle Hicilmaz or Joan Lingard, since in each case literary, cultural and linguistic traditions have undergone a unique process of fusion.

Similarly, in his article 'The fading of the French nationality?', Francis Marcoin looks at the changing nature of French children's literature as it comes to terms with an increasingly diverse population and notes that 'to Pennac and his fellow writers the world is inconceivable without the stranger who is also our neighbour.'

Beyond Europe: literature in English

Many important children's books come from other English-speaking countries such as Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Children's literature classics like *The Wizard of Oz* (from the USA), *Anne of Green Gables* (from Canada) and *The Magic Pudding* (from Australia) have been continuously in print in the UK for many years. Writers like Malachy Doyle (from Ireland), Margaret Mahy (from New Zealand) and Jean Little (from Canada) are regularly published in the UK.

Although written in English, many of the texts from English-speaking countries describe societies that are culturally very different from that of the UK. Two examples from the USA are Karen

Hesse's *Out of the Dust*, a novel in verse set in the Oklahoma during the Depression and the Dust Bowl years, and Mildred Taylor's *Solid Gold Cadillac*, a story of two black girls living in the northern United States who take a trip to the South and encounter ingrained racial prejudice. These writers set out to make historical American experiences accessible to modern children; Taylor's aim is to open up to children from all cultural backgrounds stories from her own family history:

Since writing my first book...it has been my wish to have readers walk in the shoes of the Logan family...and to feel what they felt. It has been my wish that by understanding this family and what they endured, there would be further understanding of what millions of families endured, and there would also be a further understanding of why there was a Civil Rights movement, a movement that changed our nation.

Beyond Europe: literature in translation

Very few translated books in the Reading Differences booklist come from countries beyond Europe and this was simply because so few books in this category were easily available in the UK. Some books that are only available overseas have been included in the booklist; these must be ordered from a specialist supplier or an online bookshop from the appropriate country. The editors of *Outside in* also comment critically on the fact that much good literature from non-European countries does not get translated. Yet flourishing children's literatures exist in many countries beyond Europe, including Brazil, Chile and other Latin American countries, India, Japan and South Africa.

Many of the books from outside Europe that do get translated into English are folk tales. More books like the *Puffin treasury of Indian stories* are needed, which are contemporary realistic stories rather than traditional tales.

Multicultural British literature

The Reading Differences project focused especially on international literature set outside the UK. But it also included books by UK writers relating to their countries and communities of origin, for example poetry by Caribbean poets such as John Agard and Grace Nichols, and fiction and folk tales by Jamila Gavin and Madhur Jaffrey. Such writers have by definition crossed cultures, and are writing out of an experience of change and transition. Often drawing their inspiration from their own childhood experience, some of these pioneering writers have created a multicultural 'literature of childhood' with its roots in their own countries of origin. Morag Styles writes of children's poetry that:

It is no accident that, in so far as themes linked to nationalism are addressed in modern poetry for British children, the key poets are from a generation poised between cultures which are themselves in transition. The most successfully and easily identified group are those who came originally from different parts of the Caribbean and have chosen to settle in Britain.

The Reading Differences project did not include literature set inside the UK about British multicultural communities, since this was viewed as being part of modern British literature.

Complexities

The Reading Differences booklist does include some books set in countries or communities that are not the writer's own (for example Francesco D'Adamo's *Iqbal*, an outstanding novel about child labour in Pakistan, originally written in Italian). In every case the touchstone for choice has been cultural authenticity and literary quality. But discussion of this area has to recognise that, increasingly, nationality, culture and identity, along with ideas about where books and writers belong, are slippery concepts – movements of peoples, the growth of diasporas, intermarriage

and the shifting nature of national identities mean that the attempt to pigeon-hole literature in this categorical way is sometimes going to be problematic.

Part D: How we read: critical approaches to world literature for children

Didactic or literary?

Children's books are a way of learning about life and of sharing in the personal, social and cultural experiences of others, but children's literature should not be viewed mainly as a means of socialising the young. Critics defining children's literature generally differentiate it from didactic or educational literature, but it is not always easy to make this distinction. Perhaps more than most writers, the writers of children's literature have designs on the reader.

Didacticism can be seen as a stage in the development of a children's literature; emergent children's literatures are frequently viewed as part of the task of constructing a national identity. They may be seen as a means of educating children in their cultural heritage, of preserving folk culture or of reclaiming the past. And both internationalism and multiculturalism in children's literature involve another kind of didacticism, in that they use literature to try to change young people's attitudes to other races and cultures.

The relevance of postcolonial theory

In thinking about the way in which we read different cultures, we may be able to learn from postcolonial societies, where issues of the relationship between literature and cultural identity are sharply defined. Postcolonial critical theory focuses on the emergence of 'literature by colonised people which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past' (John Lye, *Some issues in postcolonial theory*). Critics look at the way in which the literatures of colonising cultures typically took for granted the inferiority of the colonised people and distorted their experience by simplifying and romanticising experience and beliefs. Many writers in postcolonial societies may still be writing in the language of their former colonisers, and this creates a further problem: how to reclaim one's identity in a language that is not originally one's own and that is strongly identified with the colonising culture.

In colonial societies, schoolbooks were often used as a way of instilling colonial values in the young. This didacticism had a clear political purpose, and combating its after-effects is still part of the work of children's writers in postcolonial societies. The positive rehabilitation of African cultural identity is a constant theme in discussions of African children's literature. Mabel Segun observes that:

Good literature can also give a child personal identity in a continent which has been subjected to cultural imperialism through the mass importation of foreign literature which Achebe calls 'poison'.

Both Achebe and Segun have declared their commitment to rehabilitating the Nigerian child through literature designed to reveal to him his cultural identity. The other side of this issue is how far unconscious attitudes of superiority persist in the way in which, for example, white European readers read about black African experience. In approaching world literature with pupils we need to be particularly careful to avoid any suggestion of the exoticism of difference and not to lay too much stress on the otherness of people from other countries. We also need to ensure that children do not encounter only stories with traditional settings or unquestioned stereotypical roles, and to seek out literature that represents modern societies and contemporary ways of life in other countries.

Commonality and difference

It is through literature that we most intimately enter the hearts and minds and spirits of other people. And what we value in this is the difference as well as the human similarities of others: that way, as CS Lewis put it, we become a thousand different people and yet remain ourselves.

Aidan Chambers

The theme of commonality in difference arises again and again in discussions of children's literature about diverse cultures. In commenting on the Batchelder Award, the American equivalent of the Marsh Award, the critic Rosie Webb Joels observes that:

Many Batchelder winners' settings, at first glance, may seem distant from and irrelevant to contemporary Western youth's daily experiences. However the Batchelder recipients' authors, through richly varied themes, genres and styles, weave threads that are common to young people's lives in all places and in all times.... It is through the commonalities that readers can arrive at appreciation of the multitude of differences between their lives and those of their world peers.

Joels enumerates some of the common themes that commentators have found in children's literature in translation, such as 'accepting responsibility, caring for other people, coping with adversity'.

There is clear evidence that commonalities like these do communicate with children, move them, and can lead to reflective and mature discussion of the life experiences explored in texts. But it is also important that literature representing other cultural experiences should not play down questions of difference. *Passport*, an American website dealing with international children's literature, notes that:

Books representing other countries must be authentic because they speak for the culture. When books lack authenticity, readers are misinformed, which can lead to misconceptions – about the culture and the people.... Some professionals believe that children want to be exposed to books and situations from around the world. Others believe that children want to read about people that are like themselves, and thus justify 'Americanizing' books.

Although British children's publishing does not indulge in systematic anglicisation, some of the concerns raised in this website seem relevant. They include concerns about authorship, for example 'Can authors research or immerse themselves into a culture that is not their own, producing a piece of literature that accurately presents another culture?'

The interaction between the cultures of the reader and the writer and the culture represented in the text is at the heart of this question of how we approach literature from other countries.

How the reader meets the text

Ideas about human growth and development are the very stuff of literature.... In the course of a year the student usually reads works dealing with personalities in a wide variety of environments, but he is not always led to think about this. The personal strivings, the ethical problems, the social conflicts he shares through books, are often part of social patterns very different from his own.

Louise Rosenblatt

What happens when children encounter new kinds of texts in the classroom? In her approach to the study of literature the educationalist and critic Louise Rosenblatt emphasised that the text on

the printed page should be seen as a potential; only in the dynamic to-and-fro between reader and text is the work of art created. But Rosenblatt also felt strongly that students needed to be led to think about the different social and cultural patterns that they find in books. She saw literature as one of the forms that 'reveal the diversity of possible ways of life, patterns of relationship, and philosophies' that are present in society, particularly a 'heterogeneous, rapidly changing democratic society'. In *Literature as exploration* she wrote: 'Through literature we are constantly coming into contact with cultural patterns of the past or of other societies.'

All readers bring themselves and their own cultural assumptions to their reading, and we know too little about how young, inexperienced readers draw on their own cultural experience in responding to the representations of other cultures and countries that they find in international children's literature. Nor do we have much evidence of how, for instance, bilingual children living in the UK interpret the English literary texts they encounter in schools. Most classic studies of children's responses to texts (for example Donald Fry's *Children talk about books: seeing themselves as readers*) have been monocultural in character, as far as both children and texts are concerned.

Carol Fox's small-scale study 'The person behind the mask' (in *Opening new worlds*) of student teachers' reading of multicultural literature suggests that 'the growing awareness of what they hadn't known fuels the desire to read more...multicultural literature, at this stage in their education coincides for most of them with an urge to position themselves with a larger world.'

Fox notes the way in which these literary experiences ripple out into other kinds of reading: 'International/multicultural literature inevitably leads students into new social, historical and political perspectives...students become caught up in a knowledge chain whose links spread through many books.'

This carries implications for pedagogy: individual texts need to form part of a wider pattern of reading. What implications do Carol Fox's findings about student teachers have for work with younger pupils?

In teaching international or multicultural literature we need to realise that we shall always be treading a tightrope between, in Louise Rosenblatt's terms, 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading (reading for information and responding to the text as a literary work of art). Rosenblatt resisted efferent educational and critical approaches that reduced literary texts either to literary exercises in form or to ways of gaining information about the world: 'traditional and formalist methods of teaching literature treat it as a body of information to be transmitted rather than as experiences to be reflected on' ('Retrospect').

Although Rosenblatt believed in the value of exploring the social and cultural aspects of texts, she saw literary works of art as 'existing in unique personal experiences'. She always insisted on the primacy of the reader's aesthetic experience and on the need to focus on literary response in reading a literary text. Fundamental to her approach to literature is the issue of the quality of what children are offered in the classroom. She considered that certain texts were more likely to produce thoughtful aesthetic responses in a reader because they had 'more potentiality for qualitative response'. These are the kinds of texts, whatever their sources and origins, that need to be at the heart of a literature programme.

Pedagogical implications

The aim of the Reading Differences project is 'for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the distinctive qualities of literature from different traditions, and to be able to make connections and comparisons between texts from different cultures.' In order for this to happen, there will need to be:

- better understanding of successful pedagogy in this area
- better understanding of how readers read these texts
- thorough review of the texts that lend themselves to this kind of study.

How to treat cultural and national differences in the classroom always needs especially careful thought, and some texts will lend themselves to more serious treatment and discussion than others. As Carol Fox warns, 'national identities are generalisations and, inevitably, stereotypical characterisations of histories, people and settings. Some children's literature simplifies things so that children can understand them.' Substantial experience of literature from another culture may sometimes be needed in order to get past initial defensive responses to difference.

Fox has touched on the pedagogical approaches that could inform the teaching of international literature in her article 'Conflicting fictions: national identity in English children's literature about war' (in *Children's literature and national identity*). She calls for a 'multi-genre approach' as an effective way to develop children's understandings of texts from different cultures:

Adults can do much to help children towards critical readings of texts about war. Among them I would suggest a multi-genre approach, wide reading of groups of books rather than one text, introducing literature in translation to bring in other perspectives, and extensive reading of adult literature.

This has immediate implications for cross-curricular work and for a wider exploration of different cultural perspectives and settings than is possible within the English curriculum alone. Teachers working within the Reading Differences project found that work on these texts led naturally into cross-curricular work including art, drama, history, geography and ICT. Studying these books involved children in discussion, storytelling, listening to expert speakers, working on group projects and doing independent research about the countries of the origin of the books and their authors and illustrators. Children were learning about the world of the text in a way that continually brought them back to the text and enriched their reading of it.

Part E: Teaching a broader literature curriculum: how the Reading Differences project can help

Reading differences: choosing the texts

How can teachers acquaint themselves with children's books from a range of cultures? The Reading Differences project sets out to provide support for teachers trying to broaden the range of literature that they read with children. It offers several resources for teachers choosing world literature to read with their classes.

A good preparatory activity for schools embarking on this course would be to conduct an audit of their book stock in order to see how far it truly reflects a variety of cultures and traditions. Schools can identify the areas where their book stock is strong and where it needs strengthening. For instance, there may be plenty of European folk tales but none from Asia. Or there may be several poetry books by Caribbean writers, but no collections of poetry containing poems from African countries. Schools will need to consider both the range of cultures and countries represented in their book stock and the range of genres from these different geographical sources.

Schools can consult the Reading Differences booklist to help choose books. The booklist is organised into four sections: picture books, traditional tales, poetry and children's fiction. The fiction section of the booklist includes stories set in Australia, Brazil, Ethiopia, France, Ireland, Jamaica, Korea, the Middle East and Pakistan. The booklist also includes details of other sources of information about world literature for children, including other booklists and relevant websites.

What other criteria need to be kept in mind when selecting books? The Reading Differences project looked above all for books of literary quality that would be worth spending time with in the classroom, and that would lend themselves to discussion and creative interpretation. These will not necessarily all be texts that children would choose to read independently, but they are texts that children can explore and enjoy with support.

Finally the project looked for authenticity of representation: books representing other countries and cultures must be authentic, because they speak for those cultures. Books should probably be written by a member of the culture, or by somebody so familiar with it that they can represent it accurately and with understanding. This underlines the importance of looking for well-translated books from other countries, as well as books about those countries.

Reading differences: teaching a broader literature curriculum

What is involved in exploring the worlds of texts, their values, assumptions and themes? Part of the point of teaching these books is to learn from them about the worlds they come from, which may not have immediate connections with children's experience or expectations. As children read these texts they will be learning to look for evidence of what this culture and its people are like. Each text is likely to present a different challenge to the reader and to raise different issues.

The teaching of these books will therefore need to raise awareness of a text's cultural and geographical context, the insights that it provides into ways of life, and (sometimes) the literary traditions that it is drawing on. An appreciation of these features will support children in their new reading experiences and will help them to appreciate how all texts are products of their social, cultural and historical contexts and their literary traditions. Teaching should help children both to explore differences and to make analogies with their experience and their reading.

The Reading Differences project also emphasises the literary and linguistic experience that children will gain from engaging with a much broader range of literature. They will be using inference to gain information about the world of the text, for instance by interpreting the behaviour of characters in the light of cultural customs. They will be exploring different ways of

talking and different styles of writing. They will be learning to empathise with experiences that may be initially strange to them. They will be helped in all this by their general capacity to 'read the world', and by their previous experience of reading and relating to fictional worlds.

The Reading Differences leaflets and their related teaching sequences (www.qca.org.uk/english) suggest ways to approach these texts that focus on what is distinctive about their perspectives on the world, as well as how they link with children's previous reading.

Reading differences: children's responses to world literature

How do children relate to literature from different countries and societies? In work carried out in classrooms to develop the teaching sequences, it was clear that high-quality books set in very different geographical and cultural contexts involved children and generated thoughtful discussion. Children became interested anthropologists, exploring these new worlds, discovering the customs and ways of life of the people who lived there, learning about their histories, their stories and their belief systems and drawing parallels with their own experience.

The work in the classrooms made it clear that children were not at all reluctant to read about other societies and cultures but were stimulated by finding out about other times and places through stories, pictures and poems. A year 4 class studying tales from Central Asia studied different maps showing the region and traced the journey along the Silk Road on a map they made themselves. Most were able to follow the journey across the continent along the Silk Road as they listened to the story.

Both children and teachers may lack confidence initially in approaching a text that is different from ones they are used to. Overcoming that lack of confidence and enabling all readers to relate to a wider range of texts is an important aspect of this project:

On first appearances the class didn't think they'd enjoy it, but their initial negative reaction to the book was overturned by the end of the first chapter. This was a new author to them, a different type of novel that not many of them would have independently chosen, and it led to a deeper understanding of the themes and of the relationships and cultures in the book.

Part F: The texts themselves: the four categories

The Reading Differences project developed criteria for selecting appropriate texts, and exemplified these criteria through the booklist and through the teaching sequences – classroom-based examples of texts in use. Four categories of texts are included in the booklist: picture books, traditional tales, poetry and fiction.

Picture books

Good picture books have an extra dimension that stimulates a child's imagination: the text and pictures work together to tell the whole story. The Reading Differences booklist includes picture books where text and pictures together represent the culture from which the story originates, and where the role of the illustrator is as important as that of the author. Reading images needs to be encouraged and developed through discussion that involves children articulating what they are learning about the world of the book.

Traditional tales

Folk tales have a particularly important role to play in developing children's narrative education. Such stories link the oral tradition of storytelling with the literary styles and rhythms of written language. Carol Fox saw them as providing a 'bridge between orality and literacy' (*At the very edge of the forest: the influence of literature on storytelling by children*). The 'cultural patterns' that Rosenblatt suggests literature reveals to us are clearly visible in folk tales, which lend themselves particularly well to comparison and discussion.

Ted Hughes sees myths as the 'big dreams [that become] the treasured properties of a people', generated by 'the brain's fundamental genius for metaphor', and writes that 'one of the first surprises of mythographers was to find how uncannily similar these myths are all over the world. They are as alike as the lines on the palm of a human hand' ('Myth and education').

The Reading Differences project included folk tales and myths as a key category in this 'non-canonical canon'. In selecting books for study in the classroom the challenge is to find examples from a range of cultures in retellings that are powerfully written.

Poetry

Perhaps because translating poetry is so demanding, it is difficult to find many books of poetry by single poets from different cultures and traditions. The exceptions include a group of poets from a Caribbean background, who are among the most popular writers of poetry for children in Britain today. The strong oral element in their poetry lends itself particularly well to performance in the classroom. These poets have articulated the experience of culture-crossing for Caribbean and British children alike.

The Reading Differences booklist also includes some wide-ranging anthologies of international poetry that give a glimpse into many worlds and cultures, from Alaska to Australia.

Fiction

Fiction is above all the genre that lets us enter many different lives and worlds, and itself contains many genres, from realism to fantasy, from mysteries to graphic novels. Unfortunately the choice of international fiction available to children in the primary school is much narrower than it is for older students. It is not that the books don't exist – very often they do, but are just not being translated. This may reflect a general weakness in children's fiction publishing; in years 3 and 4 particularly there is a dearth of challenging international fiction, except in picture book form.

One of the main reasons why we value the imaginative worlds of literature is because they provide a way for us to stand back and reflect on human experiences which are both like and unlike our own.... Sometimes they will be geographically or historically distant and culturally unfamiliar – literature enables us to enter these distant worlds and to share in and evaluate experiences of otherness.

The core book

Younger children in key stage 2 need a much wider range of fiction to draw on; much of what is available to them at present consists of undemanding fiction published in series formats, intended as reading practice. Yet the reception that has met the work of authors such as Daniel Pennac and Jamila Gavin demonstrates that children as young as 8 and 9 can engage with books about different societies and cultures just as enthusiastically as older children.

Part G: Conclusion: A more inclusive consciousness

Culture as 'an assemblage of texts'

In her preface to *Children's literature and national identity*, Margaret Meek Spencer refers to Terry Eagleton's words in his book *The idea of culture*, where he wrote:

Culture is not only what we live by. It is also, in great measure, what we live for. Affection, relationship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfilment, intellectual enjoyment, a sense of ultimate meaning; these are closer to us than charters of human rights or trade treaties.

Meek points out that these aspects of our lives, which matter to us so much, are also the stuff of literature.

Literature gives us a way of contemplating what matters to us. If the stuff of literature did not matter to us so much, we would not spend so much time reading and studying it. The 'assemblage of texts' that is literature gives us a way of understanding better what we live for and live by. Because of this, Fred Inglis suggests that literature is part of our moral education:

The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are not just a help to moral education; they comprise the only moral education which can gain purchase on the modern world.... They are theories with which to think forwards...and understand backwards.

As well as providing us with a way of understanding ourselves, literature also gives us a way of understanding others, and of meeting people who are at one and the same time both like and unlike us. Clifford Geertz, the cultural anthropologist, sees cultures as being largely made up the 'webs of significance' that human beings create through their artefacts, texts, and other symbolic forms. He writes that 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs' (*The interpretation of cultures*). Geertz defines anthropology differently, not as a science in search of laws of behaviour, but as an interpretive activity, in search of meaning, and he sees reading a culture as analogous to reading a work of literature.

When we read literature from other cultures we are reading not only the text but also the culture that produced it. All literature needs to be read interpretatively, in search of the meanings that it might carry. But when we read a work of literature from other cultures we need to read and interpret it with particular sensitivity, attuning ourselves to what is special in this culture and noting both what seems initially strange and what we recognise from our own experience.

A more inclusive consciousness

There is a developing audience for literature that originates beyond the confines of one's own country and community, and this development is not limited to the UK. For many writers the experience of being included in this broader literary heritage is particularly fulfilling. In the words of the British Caribbean writer James Berry, 'when one's previously excluded cultural experience becomes naturally and properly included in mainstream learning...steps have been taken, away from pure ethnocentricity, in the direction of the human family.'

The opportunities that young people now have to engage with stimulating and absorbing literature from all parts of the globe can only grow, especially if they are promoted by schools. The idea of a global village is no longer a vision of the future; we now have instant access to different countries and different experiences through the internet. Travel, telecommunications and translations have brought us closer to other people on the planet, and there is an immense appetite for this kind of international contact. This is another aspect of globalisation – a very positive aspect since it suggests a growing curiosity and interest in inhabiting a wider world.

Despite explosions in modern communications, literature remains a unique route to understanding other cultures from the inside. There are immense satisfactions in the possibilities that literature offers us of imaginatively entering into other ways of being. Even in 21st-century classrooms, literature will go on being one of the most important ways in which children learn to move away from egocentrism and ethnocentrism towards a broader view of the world. Seamus Heaney has said that 'poetry has to be a working model of inclusive consciousness'; children's literature also has to speak to and include a growing and increasingly diverse audience.

Sunday O Anozie, an eminent Nigerian literary critic, in a keynote address at the International Conference on African Literature in 1991, offered an agenda for children's literature in Africa (and everywhere else in the world), seeing it as part of a process of cultural interaction that leads towards reciprocity and wholeness:

Cultures, like texts, are born differential, not in order to displace or replace – despite the verdict of history – but to supplement each other. Each text, each culture, often writes itself in the vacant spaces, and fills the interstices left by other texts and cultures: no one culture or text alone writes the full script. The world of texts and cultures, that is to say our collective differences, no matter how variously we may seek to define them to suit our own political, economic, social or even racial prejudices, are gradually and inevitably moving in the direction of a greater reconstructive wholeness.

As the 'world of texts' that we read becomes wider in its scope, inclusive of more different ways of being human, our ability to inhabit a wider actual world than the society we were born into develops. Adult readers in the UK now have better access to international literature and literature in translation than in any previous time; this paper has made the case for children to have the same kinds of opportunity of access to world literature.

Bibliography

- Anozie, Sunday O, 'The drum and the flute: reconstruction in children's literature' in Ikonne, Chidi, Oko, Emilia and Onwudinjo, Peter, *Children and literature in Africa*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), Ibadan, 1992
- Berry, James, 'Introduction' in *When I dance*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1988
- Booktrust, *Folk and fairy tales: a book guide*, London, 2004
- Chambers, Aidan, cited in Flugge, K, 'Crossing the divide: publishing children's books in the European context' in *Signal 75*, September 1994
- Dearden, Carmen Diana (ed), *Little book of Latin American folktales*, translated from Spanish by Susana Wald and Beatriz Zeller, Groundwood, Canada, 2003
- DfES, *Aiming high, raising achievement*, London, 2003
- Eagleton, Terry, *The idea of culture*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000
- Ellis, Sue and Barrs, Myra, *The core book*, CLPE, London, 1996
- Fox, Carol, 'Conflicting fictions: national identity in English children's literature about war' in Meek Spencer, Margaret, *Children's literature and national identity*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, 2001
- Fox, Carol, 'The person behind the mask: student teachers' readings of multicultural literature' in Goody, J (ed), *Opening new worlds*, NATE, Sheffield, 1995
- Fox, Carol, *At the very edge of the forest: the influence of literature on storytelling by children*, Cassell, London, 1993
- Fry, Donald, *Children talk about books: seeing themselves as readers*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1985
- Geertz, Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures*, Basic Books, New York, 1973
- Hallford, Deborah and Zaghini, Edgardo, *Outside in: children's books in translation*, Milet Publishing, Chicago, 2005
- Heaney, Seamus, *The Redress of Poetry*, Faber, London, 1995
- Hughes, T, 'Myth and Education', first published in *Children's literature in education*, 1970, available in Fox et al, *Writers, critics and children*, Heinemann, London, 1976
- Hunt, Peter (ed), *International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*, Routledge, London, 1996
- Ikonne, Chidi, Oko, Emilia and Onwudinjo, Peter, *Children and literature in Africa*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), Ibadan, 1992
- Inglis, F, *Cultural studies*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993
- Kaaberbol, Lene, 'Everyday miracles' in Hallford, Deborah and Zaghini, Edgardo, *Outside in: children's books in translation*, Milet Publishing, Chicago, 2005
- Lathey, Gillian, 'Discovering difference: studying translations for children at Roehampton' in Hallford, Deborah and Zaghini, Edgardo, *Outside in: children's books in translation*, Milet Publishing, Chicago, 2005
- Lathey, Gillian, 'The road from Damascus: children's authors and the crossing of national boundaries' in Meek Spencer, Margaret, *Children's literature and national identity*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, 2001

Lazim, Ann, 'Reading our world' in the 'Talking point' section of the Booktrusted.com website (www.booktrusted.com)

Lye, John, *Some issues in postcolonial theory*, on the Brock University website (<http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/postcol.html>)

Marcoin, Francis, 'The fading of French nationality?' in Meek Spencer, Margaret, *Children's literature and national identity*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, 2001

Meek Spencer, Margaret, *Children's literature and national identity*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, 2001

National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, *All our futures: creativity, culture and education*, Report to secretary of state for education and employment and the secretary of state for culture, media and sport, 2001

Pullman, Philip, 'Foreword' in Hallford, Deborah and Zaghini, Edgardo, *Outside in: children's books in translation*, Milet Publishing, Chicago, 2005

Rosenblatt, Louise, 'Retrospect' in Farrell, E and Squire, J (eds), *Transactions with literature*, NCTE, Urbana, IL, 1990

Rosenblatt, Louise, *Literature as exploration*, MLA, New York, 1983 (fourth edition)

Segun, Mabel D, 'Children's literature in Africa: problems and prospects' in Ikonne, Chidi, Oko, Emilia and Onwudinjo, Peter, *Children and literature in Africa*, Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), Ibadan, 1992

Styles, Morag, 'Voices of the world: national identity in British poetry for children' in Meek Spencer, Margaret, *Children's Literature and National Identity*, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, 2001

Taylor, Mildred (2003) cited in the nomination speech for the 2003 NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature

Webb Joels, Rosie, 'Weaving world understanding: the importance of translations in international children's literature' in *Children's Literature*, 1999

Websites

Passport: International children's literature – <http://passport.imaginarylands.org>

QCA: English 21 – www.qca.org.uk/english21/

QCA: Reading differences – www.qca.org.uk/english/