

*Academia needs to understand that the popular press and the mass media educate more people about issues regarding ethnicity and race than all other sources of education available to U.S. citizens. By shunning the mass media, educators are missing the obvious: that is, that more public education is done by the media than by teachers, professors, and anyone else (Lily Bartolome and Donaldo Cacedo).*

**M**y two oldest grandchildren, Holly and Melissa, are active, energetic, and creative, and spend most of their time with us playing with toys, enjoying books, and jigsaw puzzles, painting, drawing, writing, talking, gallivanting in the backyard, visiting their friends, or going to the nearby park. But they do have their down times, when they relax in front of the television set.

When Holly and Melissa stay with us, we restrict their TV time. Sometimes we choose the programs or videos. On other occasions they pick their own entertainment, their own media curriculum ... with our ultimate veto.

Actually, during their preschool years, their curricular requests went something like this: "We want to see Pocahontas (or Shirley Temple or Aladdin or The Lion King or The Puzzle Place or Scooby Doo)." They made these requests not because they wanted multicultural education or even knew that they were involved in multicultural learning. They just felt like watching one of their shows.

But wait a minute! That's not education. That's entertainment.

Half right. It is entertainment. But it is also education, because when they watch a video--or Mr. Rogers or Sesame Street or Barney and Friends or the Teletubbies or Saturday morning

cartoons--Holly and Melissa are also learning about many things, including diversity. This happens whether or not the makers of these programs have any pedagogical goals. It also happens whether or not the little girls are actually aware that they are learning.

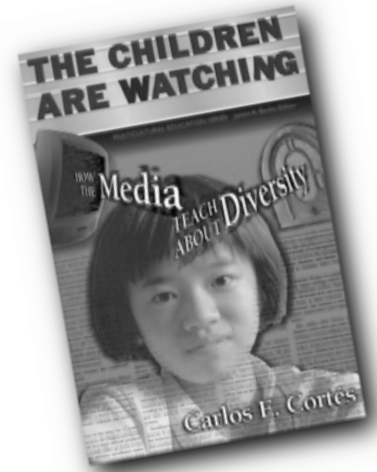
They learn about good and evil, right and wrong, life and death villainy and heroism. They learn about family values from *The Lion King* and physical disabilities (later special abilities) from *Dumbo*. They learn about interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural relations from *Pocahontas* and *The Puzzle Place*.

Entertainment media as multicultural education permeates all aspects of the mass media. Certainly audiences learn from programs and publications intended to provide news, information, analysis, and fact. But they also learn from media presumably made primarily to entertain.

Industrially produced fiction has become one of the primary shaper, of our emotions and our intellect in the 20th Century. Although these stories are supposed to merely entertain us, they constantly give us a secret education.

### **Raising Awareness**

We all can gain insight by examining our own personal media curricula,



which we each create through choice, accident, and habit. This allows us to contemplate the contemporary media curriculum's potential for teaching and learning. A multicultural media journal can be used to develop greater self-awareness of personal media multicultural curricular exposure and learning patterns. Participants keep a personal media journal of records and reactions to the multicultural teaching they encounter in their normal media consuming.

### **Conclusion**

The mass media curriculum exists, and young people will learn from it (Minow, 1995). Because of the omnipresence of the societal curriculum, school educators simply cannot control multicultural education. Like lots of things, it will happen, whether or not schools participate. Therefore, school educators confront an unavoidable choice. Will they participate effectively and constructively in the inevitable process of multicultural education? Or will they opt out, leaving multicultural education to the whims of mass media curriculum developers and other components of the societal curriculum?

*This article contains excerpts from *The Children Are Watching: How The Media Teach About Diversity* by Carlos Cortes, Teachers College Press, New York, NY, 2000.*