

Exploring the Process of Using Picture Books in the Elementary Classroom to Have Conversations about Race and Ability

What brought you to this work?

Wisniewski: I want all children to feel safe to ask about all forms of identity. Working in a majority white district, I see that most children are unaware of other cultures. Teachers and parents don't talk about race with young kids, which leads to racism and bias. For me, this has led to passion for sharing picture books that feature race with all young kids - as windows and mirrors."

Spear: In my role, I focus on supporting the learning and literacy of all children, with a particular focus on the children our school systems fail consistently, particularly children of color and children with disabilities. Deshanna and I have a shared interest in using picture books to provide young children with positive identity supports, and to examine the ways in which young children respond to picture books and conversations about race and dis/ability.

Research questions

We are interested in learning about both the process of using picture books to have conversations about race and ability, and the outcomes. What types of identity supports are represented in our sample of picture books? (Process) What types of questions and conversations help children navigate questions around race and ability? What types of conversations and activities help children engage with these ideas beyond an initial book read? (Process) How do children respond to different types of books and identity supports? What do children's responses look like across time? (Proximal Outcome)

Research plan

We will collect and code a sample of picture books using a tool we will create to determine the degree and types of race and ability identity supports in each book. Next, we will plan lessons, guiding questions, and activities. In the spring, we will then pilot lessons with children. We will document process and outcome variables via video or live observations of read aloud discussions. We will also use field notes to document teacher process and adaptations to content.

Working together

We meet monthly for project meetings where we go over process, outcomes, and reflect on our time and engagement together.



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