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SHIFTING POWER FINAL REPORT:
EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF USING PICTURE BOOKS IN THE ELEMENTARY
CLASSROOM TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND ABILITY

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Introduction

Through this project, we aimed to explore the ways in which young children respond to picture books and conversations about race and disability, and how these picture books and conversations supported children's identity development. This project builds on the work of Rudine Sims Bishop, who, in her seminal essay, recognized the critical role that picture books play in supporting young children's identity development, and called for more picture books that allowed young children to see themselves (*mirrors*), and learn about the wider world around them (*windows*) through books that offer stories about the full range of human experiences (Bishop, 1990).

The current project was undertaken as part of the Shifting Power in Educational Research and Development (Shifting Power) initiative, an innovative equity-focused research process that positions Black and Latinx educators as research leaders. Through the Shifting Power initiative, we collaborated to explore our shared interest in using picture books to think more deeply about the ways race and disability are represented in picture books, and how teachers' use of these books for intentional conversations can shape and shift children's understanding. We came to this work via classroom practice (Wisniewski, educator researcher) and research (Spear, research partner) backgrounds, and found so much ground for collaboration. Below, we situate the knowledge driving our work in our understandings from the field and the broader research literature.

Understandings from teaching/learning space: During my years as a camp counselor and undergraduate student, I developed a love and curiosity for individuals with dis/abilities. I feel like dis/abilities are ignored, and children feel unheard when they ask questions. 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. So this led to passion for sharing picture books that feature race with all young kids - as windows and mirrors. Recognizing that this doesn't happen in all homes and classrooms, makes this work more critical. By setting stage with kids and giving them language and experiences, start to give them access to content, and a trusted adult with whom they can have these conversations.

Understandings from the literature: Instructional approaches that use picture books in multifaceted ways (e.g., as mirrors, windows, and prisms) may serve as critical supports of children's positive identity development (positive racial identity, PRI; positive disability identity; PDI). In a review of the extant literature, we examined four approaches that support the development of PRI: (a) anti-racist education (ARE; Escayg et al., 2017; Husband, 2012), (b) anti-bias education (ABE; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020), (c) positive racial identity development in early education (PRIDE; University of Pittsburgh School of Education Race and Early Childhood Collaborative, 2016), and (d) critical consciousness (CC; El-Amin et al., 2017). There are important distinctions across these approaches (e.g., CC/ARE explicitly focus on identifying structural oppression, ARE emphasizes the importance of naming and interrogating racism and White Supremacy, ABE/PRIDE focus on foundational PRI supports), and it is likely that young children will require a range of supports across time and contexts. Although PDI supports have not been explored in the same depth in early childhood contexts, there are comparable components of disability identity development (e.g., Forber-Pratt et al., 2017) and indications that similar approaches are needed to support children's PDI across time and context.

When examined collectively, with a particular focus on early childhood, these approaches indicate five types of critical supports for children: (a) Representation, (b) Identity, (c) Diversity, (d) Critical

Consciousness, and (e) Empowerment. When used collectively, in a multifaceted way, these align strongly with mirror, window, and prism approaches to supporting PRI & PDI.

Project Aims: The purpose of this Shifting Power project was to use 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 disability. Specifically, our goal was to learn more about both the process of using picture books to have conversations about race and ability. Toward these purposes, we sought to address the following research questions:

1. What types of identity supports are represented in our sample of picture books?
2. 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?
3. How do children respond to different types of books and identity supports? How do these books impact children's learning and understanding?

Method

Book Selection: We curated a sample of 28 picture books from various sources (e.g. *Tutu Teacher*, *Here We Read*, *Teaching Like a Rockstar* Instagram accounts, *Scholastic Book Club*,) that centered characters of color with and without disabilities, that had potential to offer racial and disability identity supports via their plots, or the types of conversations they might elicit with young children. As such, given this careful curation, our sample was more representative in terms of race and disability than what is typically represented in picture books. For instance, recent picture content analyses indicate that only 29% of recently published picture books feature main characters of color; only 3.4% feature main characters with disabilities (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019).

The Culturally Responsive Picture Book Tool: Although our sample focused on characters of color with and without disabilities, we were particularly interested in examining differences in the quality, and components of identity supports, contained within these books. Toward this purpose, we adapted a tool (Briggs & Spear, 2020) to examine the ways in which racial and disability representation and identity supports were portrayed within these books.

The original tool was adapted from a broader coding scheme used to examine the cultural responsiveness of curricular programs (Bryan-Gooden et al., 2019). Researchers at the Office of Child Development adapted this tool to focus specifically on picture books. Although the original tools did consider multiple aspects of identity (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status), they were not considered equally (e.g., only one item on disability) or intersectionally. Toward this purpose, we adapted the tool (Culturally Responsive Picture Book Tool; CRPBT; see Appendix A) to ensure that racial and disability identities were examined equally, and we reframed many questions to account for more complex and nuanced understandings of racial and disability identity. As part of this process, we used the CRPBT to examine books that focused only on disability (e.g., *We're All Wonders*) to ensure that the tool was aligned to capture nuanced differences in disability narratives as well, though we did not include these books in our final example given our focus on picture books that featured stories of characters of color with and without disabilities.

We also added a section for intersectional perspectives. Although we were particularly interested in the ways in which our picture books represented intersectional experiences of race and disability (e.g.

Crenshaw, 1989; Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013) we found that the tool itself worked better at the individual identity level (e.g., coding disability and racial identity representation across multiple items). This did allow us to look at differences in the ways in which race and disability were represented across the books (e.g., whether books that included both race and disability treated one identity in more explicit ways than others), however we used qualitative reflections to note any specific insights into the ways in which the books integrated more intersectional perspectives into the unique experiences of characters of color with disabilities.

The final CRPBT contained four scales: (a) Diversity scale, (b) Representation scale, (c) Social Justice Orientation scale, and (d) Intersectionality scale. While these scales don't perfectly reflect with our broader view of PRI/PDI supports, the Diversity and Representation scales align with the first three PRI/PDI supports (diversity, representation, identity), and the Social Justice Orientation scale aligns with the latter two PRI/PDI supports (critical consciousness, empowerment). As such, we felt this tool was a useful metric for examining the types of identity supports in our sample of books. Each CRPBT scale is described in turn.

The *Diversity Scale* was designed to analyze the types of identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, disability) represented via the main characters in a given book. This scale gives a broad overview of the ways in which characters from different social identities are reflected in a given story, and was used to focus additional coding, as picture books often contain a "cast of characters" and this scale helped coders determine where to focus coding. This scale was also used to drive item selection on the *Representation Scale* (e.g., if a book had characters of color with disabilities, then the researchers would code both race and disability representation items; if the book had characters of color without disabilities, the researchers would code only race representation items). Although this scale indicated more nuanced information about the racial, ethnic, gender, and disability identities of a given book, for the purposes of our project, this scale was used to generate an overall BIPOC and Disability indicator for a given book.

The *Representation Scale* was designed to analyze the ways in which aspects of characters social identities were represented in the story, and the ways in which these stories accurately and nuanced representation of characters from given identity groups, in ways that reflect full humanity and complexity of multifaceted characters, not stereotypes. This scale is made up of 11 items, though three of the items were designed to be identity-specific (e.g. coded for race, disability, gender), and as such for books with characters of color with disabilities, these items were coded twice for both racial identity and disability identity representation. It is important to note that with our adaptation, additional aspects of identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity) could also be examined, but for the purposes of our project our analyses included only racial and disability identity codes.

The *Social Justice Orientation Scale* was designed to analyze the ways in which picture books explore and support the development of critical consciousness about systems of oppression, and actions that can be taken to disrupt these systems. It contains items related to multiple perspectives, centering marginalized voices, relationships among people and power dynamics, and items related to the ways in which books support children in making personal connections and exploring actions within their spheres of influence. This scale is made up of 8 items. The majority of the items on the original NYU Scorecard scale aimed to look at issues of power and oppression broadly (e.g., focused on "marginalized populations" or broad cross-identity categories), there were a few items that specifically focused on the experiences of one group (e.g., communities of color). As we adapted the tool, we considered adapting all items to have a race- and disability-specific components, however our initial coding process yielded

highly similar results. As such we chose to adapt this scale so that all items were at the broader level, so the scores reflected an overall social justice orientation, with the idea that the results of the Representation Scale, and differences found therein in terms of race and disability, could inform our interpretation and understanding of the Social Justice Scale.

As noted above, the *Intersectionality Scale* was created as a space for reflective field notes. As such, qualitative data from this scale was used to inform thematic analyses and interpretations. We would like to continue to develop this scale in future work.

Scoring Overview: Items on the Representation and Social Justice Orientation Scales were coded on a likert-like 5-point scale. For each item, a book was coded as *excellent* (+2), *good* (+1), *average* (0), *unclear* (-1), or *does not have* (-2). As such, each scale had a scale that encompassed a full range of entirely negative to entirely positive scores. This was based on the original NYU Scorecard scoring approach, however because this original tool was designed to address a wide range of materials, this scoring approach led to limited variability and nuance when used with our more positively skewed, highly curated sample.

As such, we adjusted the scoring approach such that high, moderate, and low categories were created from an adjusted minimum of zero (the midpoint on all scales). For each scale, the book received a total score, which was then divided into an adjusted low (<33%), moderate (33% to <66%), and high (>66%) range scores, based on a minimum of zero. The low category was expanded so that any scores below zero ($n = 2$ items scored at -1 for one book) were included. Although the lower category was therefore much more than the lowest third of the scale, this approach allowed us to capture the variability in our positively skewed sample.

This approach allowed us to examine at individual differences in Representation and Social Justice Orientation, as well as a combined overall scale. The approach allowed us to also compare scores for multiple and single identity books. Table 1 below provides an overview of the scoring categories.

Table 1. Overview of Scoring Categories

		High	Mod	Low
REP	<i>1ID</i>	16-22	8-15	< 7
	<i>2ID</i>	20-28	10-19	< 9
SJO		12-16	6-11	< 5
Overall	<i>1ID</i>	38-26	25-13	< 12
	<i>2ID</i>	44-30	29-15	< 14

Coding Process: Our initial sample included 28 books, however we dropped some books due to issues like a lack of racial or disability representation, developmental concerns ($n = 5$), for a total coded sample of 23 books. We selected 3 books to team code, as we worked to fine tune the measure and establish reliability. The majority of the books were then coded independently by the teacher researcher, with 20% of books ($n = 4$) double coded by research partner as reliability checks; two additional books were independently coded by the research partner. Given that this is a new tool, we used consensus coding rather than reliability tests to ensure that our coding aligned, and reviewed any disagreements on reliability checks to come to an agreed-upon consensus code.

Pilot Approach: Our second and third research questions were focused specifically on using our picture books in the classroom, and on examining the ways children responded to the various books. As part of this process, the first author (Wisniewski, educator researcher) reviewed all 28 books, and then selected a subsample of books to use with her class ($n = 19$). She then prepared lesson plans and materials (see Appendix B for examples), and read these books to her 2020-2021 class of second graders. The educator researcher reflected on her classroom demographics and the district as a whole. The district’s student body contains significantly more white students than any other population. When picking class read alouds, the educator researcher knew she had to be intentional so these white students saw the world outside their district (e.g., *windows*). In this specific classroom, there were four children of color; two of these children were of mixed race. The remaining eight students were white. The educator researcher wanted to pick books that connected the children of color with their identity, while also offering white children *windows* onto different experiences and identities than their own. For instance, the book *Hair Love* was chosen when a specific student hated her curls. Other books were chosen to support students in understanding and connecting with a student with severe autism, with the goal of educating peers and supporting this student’s empowerment. With each book, the classroom went through a routine that entailed reading the text and making connections, either with the educator researcher making personal connections, or connections to the students, or the world. We talked about connections they made or questions they had. The educator researcher constantly considered the “whole child” when picking a text. The conversations encouraged the students to confidently discuss race and disability.

In an ideal world, we would have been able to observe or record these conversations to review together, and look deeply at conversations, scaffolds, and engagement. Given pandemic conditions, and the fact that this was a pilot, we evaluated the process of using the picture books with children, and their impacts on student learning, through the use of systematic impact ratings for each book, and then through follow-up reflective interviews.

With the systematic impact ratings, we went through and gave each book a score on a scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high) to reflect the impact reading the book had on children’s learning about race and disability; this score also reflected the quality of conversation that came from reading the book. These scores also serve as a validity check for the CRPBT, and offer interesting insights into differences between the content of a book, and how it is used – by a skilled adult – to foster learning with children.

We then did a deeper dive reflective interview to learn more about the process and impact of a portion of the books. Given time constraints, we chose to focus on six of the books that received the highest impact score. In these interviews, we discussed the lesson approach and framing, children’s responses to the books, and examples of learning and ongoing impact these books had on children’s thinking across the school year.

Findings

Book Coding

Overall Ratings: Across our curated sample of 23 picture books, 16 (70%) had main characters of color, compared to 7 (30%) that featured characters of color with disabilities, or in some limited cases characters of color and white characters with disabilities. (Given the limited availability of picture books that feature characters of color with disabilities, we chose to include these despite the fact that they did not align with our research questions.) Table 2 below provides an overview of the Representation, Social Justice Orientation, and Total scores across this sample.

Table 2. Summary of Overall Results

	Representation	Social Justice Orientation	Total Score
High	10 (44%)	12 (52%)	11 (48%)
Moderate	7 (30%)	9 (39%)	10 (43%)
Low	6 (26%)	2 (9%)	2 (9%)

Note. Percentages are rounded to equal 100%.

It is important to reiterate that our sample was carefully curated to include picture books with the potential to provide young children with positive identity supports. Our adjusted scoring process allowed us to take a more nuanced look at this sample, and the variability within it, and therefore highlights differences in the types of representation and social justice supports included in a given book, even within our curated sample. With our adjusted scoring process, only about half of the books scores high overall, with similar findings in terms of overall Representation and Social Justice Orientation.

Overall Ratings by Race and Race + Disability: We were also interested in differences between books that provided only racial identity supports, compared to those that provided both racial and disability identity supports. Table 3 below provides an overview of this comparison.

Table 3. Comparison of Scores by Main Character Identity Type

	Race			Race + Disability		
	Representation	SJOrientation	Total Score	Representation	SJOrientation	Total Score
High	7 (44%)	8 (50%)	7 (44%)	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	4 (57%)
Moderate	4 (25%)	6 (38%)	7 (44%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)
Low	5 (31%)	2 (12%)	2 (12%)	1 (14%)	0	0

Note. SJOrientation = Social Justice Orientation. Percentages are rounded to equal 100%. 16 BIPOC books were coded, and 7 BIPOC + Disability books were coded.

Here, we saw interesting patterns when looking across both subsamples, though it is important to note that the race + disability sample had less than half the number of books than the race only sample. In terms of Representation, just less than half of the books received high scores across both the race only and the race + disability samples. Far more books in the race only sample received low Representation scores. Books in the race + disability sample also scored notably higher on the Social Justice Orientation scale, and therefore also had higher Total scores.

Given the fact that picture books that feature main characters with disabilities are much less prevalent in mainstream publishing (and books that feature characters of color with disabilities are even less so), it is possible that books that fit this selection criteria were more aligned with questions of representation and social justice.

Patterns across Individual Books: When we looked at the individual books, there were interesting differences in terms of Representation and Social Justice Orientation patterns. Some books were consistently “of a type”: seven books (four race, three race + disability) scored high across all scales, five books (three race, two race + disability) scored moderate across all scales, two books (both race only) scored low. The remaining books had varying patterns (e.g., low representation/high social justice; high representation/moderate social justice). Table 4 below provides details about the individual book-level scores.

Table 4. Book-Level Coding Summary

Title	Main Character(s) Analysis		REPRESENTATION	SJOrientation	Total Score
	Race	Disability			
Sofia Valdez, Future Prez	X		19	15	34
Our Favorite Day of the Year	X		18	15	33
Your Name is a Song	X		17	15	32
I Am Whole	X		17	12	29
When the Shadbush Blooms	X		17	11	28
Thank You Omul!	X		19	9	28
Halal Hot Dogs	X		17	10	27
The Colors of Us	X		12	11	23
Hair Love	X		15	8	23
Eyes that Kiss in the Corner	X		14	8	22
The Name Jar	X		7	14	21
I Am Human	X		8	12	20
Be You	X		5	12	17
Violet	X		5	12	17
Immi's Gift	X		6	4	10
Don't Hug Doug	X		0	-1	-1
She Persisted	X	X	23	16	39
She Persisted Around the World	X	X	23	16	39
She Persisted in Sports	X	X	23	16	39
Just Ask	X	X	14	16	30
Where's Rodney	X	X	14	11	25
Ada Twist, Scientist	X	X	14	9	23
Too Sticky	X	X	4	12	16

Note. SJOrientation = Social Justice Orientation Scale. Green cells indicate books received a “HIGH” score. Orange cells indicate books received a “MODERATE” score. Red cells indicate books received a “LOW” score.

These individual book level scores provide interesting insights into the types of PRI/PDI supports available in our sample of books. To reiterate, the Representation scale aligns with PRI/PDI supports that focus on representation, diversity, and identity. The Social Justice Orientation scale aligns with PRI/PDI supports that focus on empowerment and critical consciousness. It is interesting to note the variability in these types of supports, where there are some books that are high in across all of these supports (e.g., *Your Name is a Song*, the *She Persisted* books) – these books therefore have the potential to support children in understanding multiple, complex aspects of identity, critical consciousness, and empowerment.

If we think about PRI/PDI supports along a continuum, the supports that align with the Social Justice Orientation scale are more complex, and some books may move beyond broad questions of representation to focus on these larger issues around social consciousness (e.g., *Violet*) or empowerment (e.g., *Be You*). In this sense, our findings that some books scored in the low to moderate

range in terms of Representation but high on Social Justice make sense, though it is also important to reiterate that some books that are actually strong examples of complex representation (e.g., *The Name Jar*, *Hair Love*, *Eyes that Kiss in the Corner*) may have scored lower because they focused only on one character or family or culture, rather than including a wide range of “diverse” characters. This is an issue with the CRPBT that will need to be addressed in future iterations of the tool.

The Representation scale supports may be less complex (e.g., not requiring an understanding of structural oppression), but in terms of child development and children’s understanding of race and disability, these representation supports are foundational, and critical to children’s understanding of race and disability. It is interesting to look, therefore at books that scored high only on the Representation Scale (e.g., *Thank You Omu!*, *When the Shadbush Blooms*) and also consider how these may be critical tools for supporting young children’s PRI/PDI, including their later development of critical consciousness and empowerment. It was interesting to us that there were not more books that fit this pattern (i.e., high Representation, low or moderate Social Justice Orientation), as we have found these types of books to be prevalent in early childhood and elementary contexts where we teach and research, but again some of this may have been an issue with the tool itself, or an artifact of our sample.

Insights on Differences in Race and Disability Books: We were particularly interested in this project in thinking about race and disability intersectionally, and the ways in which picture books might be tools to help children understand both race and disability, and the unique intersectional experiences of children of color with disabilities. We found very few books that addressed these questions, but we did see some interesting patterns that came out of our limited sample.

The books that scored highest here were the *She Persisted* books, which were very explicit (and somewhat formulaic) in terms of including women of color and women with disabilities and talking about barriers that these women experienced and how they overcame them. The book *Just Ask* was somewhat similar, though it did not score as highly on Representation, in part because of differences in how it treated race and disability. This book was similarly explicit in terms of examining the experiences of children with disabilities, and had strong Social Justice Orientation supports; however it scored slightly lower in terms of Representation because while it included children from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, it was clearly centering disability and not race, so there were some differences in scoring on the race and disability items.

Other books in our sample were more intersectional, but also less explicit, and therefore received lower scores. For instance, we considered the book *Ada Twist, Scientist* to speak to both racial and disability representation in nuanced and important ways, even though neither race nor disability are explicitly named in the plot. It is worth noting that many do not read *Ada* through a disability lens, however the behaviors and learning style of this character present a wonderful opportunity to explore disabilities in a young Black girl that are often disproportionately underrepresented (e.g., autism, speech and language disorders; Morgan et al., 2015). This type of book, that can interact with readers’ perspectives and be used in multifaceted ways, raises interesting questions in how we want to think about our texts and use them with children. When we’re thinking about intersectionality with young children, we do want to help them to understand both unique and intersecting aspects of identity and experience. It is therefore reasonable to assume we will need a range of books to support this, however we would expect books that speak to intersectionality to be more complex – our coding tool needs to be able to capture and reflect that complexity. Future iterations of the CRPBT need to account for this.

Book Coding Summary: These findings are interesting and important, as the picture books that young children read can have huge implications on what they learn and how they make sense of the world. But picture books are also unique, when used with young children, as they go beyond the typical interactions of a text and its reader, but also include the adult who is reading, and therefore mediating, the textual experience for the child. In this sense, it's not just what books we choose to use with children that matter for their impact on positive identity supports, but also how we use them.

In this sense, with a skilled adult, a book with a lower Representation or Social Justice Orientation score can be used to have important conversation about racial or disability identity (e.g., *Ada Twist, Scientist*), just as a high quality book can be used for surface-level or problematic conversations with a less skilled adult. In the next section, we explore the results of our pilot work in using these books in the classroom and start to examine the impacts these books and the conversations they led to had on children's learning.

Pilot Impact Analyses

After preparing and reading 19 books with her 2020-2021 class of second graders, the educator researcher went through and rated the impact of each book and its subsequent conversations on children's learning. In this context, learning was broadly conceptualized, and included all aspects of PRI/PDI (i.e., learning about Representation aligned components and Social Justice Orientation aligned components). Table 5 below provides an overview of these impact ratings and highlights the differences in these ratings compared to CRPBT scores.

These impact rating results highlight interesting patterns and differences across the CRPBT ratings and pilot results. Some of these differences may be due to issues that need to be addressed in the CRPBT itself (e.g., underscoring on less explicit texts such as *Ada Twist, Scientist, Hair Love*). Other discrepancies may be a result of the important role books that support young children's understanding of racial and disability representation and identity can have on their overall understanding and learning about the world (e.g., higher impact ratings on representation-focused books such as *Thank You Omu!* And *Halal Hot Dogs*). In this sense, these impact ratings offer an important validity check to consider as we continue to refine and use the CRPT in future research.

Beyond that, however, these discrepancies may simply be contextual, as books that aligned specifically with the experiences of students (e.g., *Hair Love*) or happenings in the world (e.g., *Eyes that Kiss in the Corner, The Name Jar* were used to counter current examples of Asian hate) were more impactful for student learning. More than likely, student learning is impacted by a combination of all these factors, and ultimately it was the educator researcher's skilled use of these books – knowing her students, knowing herself, and using that knowledge to inform her instruction – that led to differences in impact.

Table 5. Overview of Impact Ratings.

Title	Main Character(s) Analysis		Representation	SJOrientation	Total Score	Impact Ratings
	Race	Disability				
Sofia Valdez, Future Prez	X		19	15	34	2
Our Favorite Day of the Year	X		18	15	33	1
Your Name is a Song	X		17	15	32	3
I Am Whole	X		17	12	29	3
When Shadbush Blooms	X		17	11	28	1
Thank You Omu!	X		19	9	28	3
Halal Hot Dogs	X		17	10	27	3
The Colors of Us	X		12	11	23	3
Hair Love	X		15	8	23	3
Eyes that Kiss in the Corner	X		14	8	22	3
The Name Jar	X		7	14	21	3
I Am Human	X		8	12	20	1
Be You	X		5	12	17	2
Violet	X		5	12	17	3
Immi's Gift	X		6	4	10	1
Don't Hug Doug	X		0	-1	-1	3
She Persisted	X	X	23	16	39	2
She Persisted Around the World	X	X	23	16	39	2
She Persisted in Sports	X	X	23	16	39	2
Just Ask	X	X	14	16	30	3
Where's Rodney	X	X	14	11	25	1
Ada Twist, Scientist	X	X	14	9	23	3
Too Sticky	X	X	4	12	16	2

Note. SJOrientation = Social Justice Orientation Scale. Green cells indicate books received a “HIGH” score. Orange cells indicate books received a “MODERATE” score. Red cells indicate books received a “LOW” score.

Follow-Up Reflective Interview Findings: In reflecting further upon the books that had the biggest impact on children’s learning, several themes emerged. One important theme aligned with the points noted above, that it is the teachers’ use of the book, in conversation, that makes a critical difference. For instance, in discussing the impact of the book *Your Name is a Song*, the educator researcher noted:

Students got to learn more about me, and my vulnerability with my name - how it's difficult for people to pronounce and spell. Students had similar experiences and felt strong connections. We talked about empowering ourselves to correct people, even though it feels awkward, and how it's okay to ask people to resay their name for clarification.

Similar points about personal connections to the text arose when reflecting on reading the book *Hair Love*. Not all teachers will have the same “mirror” experiences with a text as their students, but when

they do, leaning in to their own vulnerabilities and lived experiences can help children understand and navigate the complex ideas that arise through these stories.

After reading this, the next day I did my hair like the character's. We talked about feeling insecure about hair being curly and hard to comb...These conversations can be hard and discouraging – but we made space for that conversation. Kids asked questions about hair. Lots [of learning] with that book. For one biracial student – after reading this, she felt concern for her hair - started wearing bonnet at night. Her biological mom had bought it, but the adoptive mom and girl hadn't known what it was. [After reading the book, she said] Now I wear it to protect my hair. Her mom expressed gratitude, didn't know what it was for - now she's speaking up and mom understands why.

These books provided children a range of identity supports. When reading the book *Just Ask*, children connected with a wide number of different disabilities that the characters in the book describe. This supported children's language and communication about themselves and each other, as they "felt comfortable talking about themselves and their differences after reading this."

When reading *Ada Twist, Scientist*, children made connections to the peers, and expanded their understanding of what it means to be "smart," and shifted their understanding, and relationships, with people in their own lives.

What we liked about this was a discussion of how Ada was delayed in speech, and we talked about how for some people it's Autism, for some kids it's just developmental. We talked about [my son's] speech therapy, which the kids knew about. We talked a lot about the message that even though Ada couldn't speak, she's so intelligent. They connected this to my student with autism, and suddenly see him as highly intelligent (e.g., tech skills) - saw strengths and intelligence in people with autism. [Reading this book really] shifted how they treated this student – they treated him with respect and care the whole year.

These reflections illustrate the powerful combination of mirror, window, and prism moments for children and adults across a classroom community, and show the importance not only of what is in the book, but how it is used by the teacher, to support children's learning and understanding about their positive racial and disability identities.

Limitations

Several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results of this project. First and foremost, we were not able to examine the impacts and outcomes of using these books with children in the classroom the way we had originally intended due to COVID 19 pandemic restrictions. Although we did adjust our approach to evaluate these questions in an adapted manor, future research should expand these approaches to include observations and evaluations of student work and learning.

Another limitation is related to limits in the ways we were able to examine PRI/PDI intersectionally. Intersectionality is not about layering various identities on top of each other. Although there are benefits to looking at each social identity explored in a book individually and seeing differences, this tool did not really allow us look at the true intersection of multiple identities. We addressed this through qualitative field notes, but our sample was small and rather limited, and we would like to explore with

more books and discussions with students to see themes that come up in more depth in order to consider whether the tool can be adapted for use in this way.

Several limitations have been noted throughout with CRPBT itself. One limitation is related to issues with the scoring approach that we used on the CRPBT. We used the same scoring categories as the original NYU Scorecard, and while this allowed us to compare some of our early scores to their coded categories, we did find some challenges with this scoring approach. For instance, some items such as questions related to family representation were not reflected in a book about a single character; the existing score card penalized all books for not having this, yet there is no reason to assume that this is a universal component of every picture book. We accounted for this in some cases by defaulting to the “average” score so as not to penalize a book, but in future iterations of the tool, we would like to explore a different scoring approach so that items aren’t assumed to be universal (e.g., adding a *not applicable* anchor) or adjusting items to be more generalizable.

In addition, our scoring approach was adapted to align with our positively skewed sample, and allow us to examine nuances in quality related to representation and social justice in our carefully curated sample. As such, it may be valid to argue that all the books included were higher than some of the traditional texts and curricular programs the original NYU Scorecard was designed to evaluate, however we actually think our approach captured valid differences in these texts, and that some of the books that scored in the lower ranges were appropriately categorized. Future research with this tool is needed to examine the tool’s validity with a larger sample and to determine appropriate scoring anchors. Books having characters of color or characters with disabilities should not automatically be scored as moderate or high if the measure is effective and accurate.

Finally, our finding that books that focused on disabilities scored higher across the board than books that focused on race only may be an issue with the CRPBT measure as well. Our adaptation of the tool made space so that picture books that act simply as “mirrors or windows” could still receive high scores in terms of representation. As such, books that featured stories about characters of color and characters with disabilities as multifaceted, complex humans that either reflect lived experiences back to children of similar identities (i.e., mirrors) or provide insights into those experiences to children who don’t share those identities (i.e., windows) were still considered high in terms of representation, whether or not race or disability were explicitly explored as part of the plot. Therefore, books that featured characters of color or characters with disabilities via illustrations, or in terms of cultural or disability contexts were included. However, the Social Justice Orientation scale required more explicit content from the books, and some of the general items on the Representation scale were similarly explicit. It is possible that books that included characters with disabilities were more explicitly focused on representation and empowerment (e.g., authors made intentional choices to center characters of color with disabilities and to frame disability within a larger social context), whereas books about racially diverse characters featured a wider range of plot types (e.g., celebrating differences or highlighting stories and voices of diverse groups). We hoped to capture these types of plots with our adaptations to the measure, as we think these types of picture books are also hugely important for helping young children understand race and disability, and develop social justice skills, but it is possible that this is a measurement issue. This difference in scores could also be related to differences in the subsamples and the books themselves, but as we discuss below, there are some instances of lower than expected scores on some of the “celebrating differences” and “own voices” books that we think are very high quality, so this may be something we need to adapt with future iterations of the tool.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Collectively, this project has shed so much light on the process of using picture books with young children to have conversations about race and disability, and has presented us with a wonderful collaboration opportunity. We have had so many rich conversations about these books, and coding and reflecting on their use in practice has deepened our understanding of the potentials of these books, and given us much to think about as we use these books in practice. And the opportunity to collaborate and reflect on these picture books' use in practice, and to explore the ways children respond to and think about these books, has been so important and informative.

Moving forward, we look forward to continuing to collaborate. We have learned much about the coding process, and will be adapting the CRPBT further for other projects, including the Office of Child Development Book Drive, and through work on the 3Rs Early School Age Cohort as part of The Pittsburgh Study. We also plan to share our findings with Hampton School District, the larger Shifting Power initiative, and will continue to find ways to consider the PRI/PDI supports in picture books, and to explore the ways students respond to them. This collaboration has offered a rich opportunity to enact and apply research in the classroom, and we are excited to continue to partner and explore the ways this type of work can support students' learning and development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Culturally Responsive Picture Book Tool (CRPBT)

Book Title		Coder Initials					Date	
Item		Coding						
DIV#	Diversity		Girl/ Woman	Boy/Man	LGBTQIA+	Differently Abled	Intersectional	Total
D1	Main Character Analysis: Diversity of Main characters (any character in the story who is <i>vital to the plot</i>):							
		Middle Eastern						
		Asian/Pacific Islander						
		Black/African						
		Latinx						
		Native American						
		White						
		Racially Ambiguous						
		Multiracial						
		Differently Abled						
		Animal						
	Total							
D1a	Total Number of Main Characters: (Enter #)							
D1b	Notes on Intersectional Identities Represented							

Note: Only code Representation and Social Justice Scales for those identities represented in the book.
(e.g., if book only features characters of color, do not code the disability items on the representation scale)

REP#	Representation	Excellent +2	Good +1	AVG/ Acceptable 0	Unclear -1	Does Not Have -2
R1	The book features visually diverse characters, and the characters from non-dominant populations do not all look alike.					
R2	There are references to different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions, names, and clothing.					
R3	Diverse ethnicities and nationalities are portrayed – not all Asian families are Chinese, not all Latinx families are Mexican, etc.					
R4	Diverse family structures (i.e. single parents, adopted or foster children, same-sex parents, other relatives living with the family, etc.) are represented.					
R5a	<i>Characters of color come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, in terms of family wealth, educational attainment, income, housing status. If characters from non-dominant populations come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the book moves beyond stereotypes</i>					
R5b	<i>Characters with disabilities come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, in terms of family wealth, educational attainment, income, housing status. If characters from non-dominant populations come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the book moves beyond stereotypes</i>					
R6a	<i>Characters of color are main characters and not just sidekicks.</i>					
R6b	<i>Characters with disabilities are main characters and not just sidekicks.</i>					
R7a	<i>The book treats characters' racial identity in affirming, complex, and humanizing ways, which can take many forms, including (A) race is not central, and characters of color are in a variety of roles that could also be filled by a white character OR (B) if race is central to the storyline and/or a source of conflict, and the book moves beyond stereotypes to show full complexity and humanity of characters of different races</i>					
R7b	<i>The book treats characters' disability identity in affirming, complex, and humanizing ways, which can take many forms, including (A) disability is not central to the storyline. Characters with disabilities are in a variety of roles that could also be filled by a character without a disability OR (B) if disability is a source of conflict or central to the storyline, the book moves beyond stereotypes to show full complexity and humanity of characters of with disabilities</i>					
R8	Social situations/problems that arise are not seen as problems with the individual character(s), but as a part of a larger societal context.					
R9	Characters from non-dominant populations are not represented stereotypically, or presented as foreign or exotic.					
R10	Problems faced by characters with non-dominant identities are not resolved through the benevolent intervention of a character from the dominant group (e.g., a white person, a male, a person without a disability).					
R11	Diverse characters are rooted in their own cultures and are not ambiguous.					
Rtotal	Total Number of Points per Rep Coding Category	X (x2) =	X (x1) =	X (x0) = 0	X (x-1) =	X (x-2) =
		TOTAL: X				

SJ#	Social Justice Orientation	Excellent +2	Good +1	AVG/ Acceptable 0	Unclear -1	Does Not Have -2
SJ1	The book highlights non-dominant populations and their strengths and assets, so all children/students can relate.					
SJ2	The story communicates a strengths-based perspective when representing non-dominant populations by highlighting their strengths and knowledge rather than their flaws.					
SJ3	The book does not communicate negativity or hostility toward people of marginalized backgrounds through verbal or nonverbal insults, slights or snubs.					
SJ4	The story challenges the status quo by presenting alternate points of view as equally important & valid.					
SJ5	The book recognizes the value, integrity, and knowledge of non-dominant populations.					
SJ6	The book presents different points of view on the same event or experience, especially points of view from marginalized people/communities.					
SJ7	The book provides opportunities for children to connect the story to social or political concerns that may affect their lives.					
SJ8	The book encourages students to take actions that combat inequity or promote equity within the school or local community.					
SJtotal	Total Number of Points per SJ Coding Category	X (x2) =	X (x1) =	X (x0) = 0	X (x-1) = 0	X (x-2) =
		Total: X				

INT#	Intersectional Perspectives	INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES NOTES
INT1	If book represents characters with intersecting non-dominant identities, what do we notice? Are they treated in additive, unique ways? Are both identities treated with same Representation and SJO approach?	

Appendix B: Sample Lesson Materials

To review lesson plans and student materials, go to:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAEc813t7So/C3xljWVP19A4U_SYjAvfQ/view?utm_content=DAEc813t7So&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton#7