

Critical Race Content Analysis of Latinx Representation in Children’s Picture Books

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Project Overview

In 2021, only 7% of the books published in the U.S. centered, or detailed stories about Latinx characters in picture books (Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2022). Scholars engaged in the analysis of children’s books have argued the low number of books published about People of Color leads to underrepresentation and lack of mirrors for Children of Color (Bishop, 1990). However, as data from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center shows see Table 1., there is a lack of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for young Latinx readers. This project is concerned with examining contemporary representations of Latinx characters in books that were published in 2021, to better understand whether the stories culturally affirm or perpetuate stereotypes of Latinx communities.

Table 1. Children’s Books By and/or About Black, Indigenous and People of Color Received by the CCBC–U.S. Publishers Only 2021*

Year	Books Received at CCBC (US Pubs)	Black/ African		Indigenous		Asian		Latine		Pacific Islanders		Arab	
		By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About
2021	3,195*	302	441	47	62	463	337	312	236	8	6	21	21

*refer to the link in the references for the full website for data compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center

Research Question(s)

- How are Latinx characters portrayed in children’s picture books?
- How are race, gender, class, language, and immigration status portrayed in Latinx children’s picture books?

Data Collection

Using the Cooperative Children’s Book Center’s, Diversity Statistics Book Search, I used filters to select “Latine” primary characters and “picture books” to identify book titles published in 2021 in the U.S.. A total of 51 children’s picture books about Latinx characters were identified for analysis

Methodology

Given the award period is brief, I worked with my undergraduate research assistant to focus on organizing the data and conducting the data collection of the 51 books. We used a Critical Race Content Analysis (CRCA) Guide, developed by colleagues and me. The CRCA guide has five central prompts with guiding questions for analysis, refer to Table 2.

Table 2. Conducting a Critical Race Content Analysis (Perez Huber, Camargo Gonzalez, & Solórzano, 2020)

Centralizing racism and intersecting forms of oppression in the storylines of books about People of Color	Uncovering ideologies of white supremacy that underlie racist storylines and literacy practices	Centralizing culturally authentic experiences of People of Color in texts/images	Using interdisciplinary knowledge to consider the socio-historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts of the text	Challenging, critiquing, and transforming systemic inequity in stories through the use of narrative devices and other strategies as a move toward social justice
Guiding Questions: • What identities or characteristics are assigned by race, class, gender, immigration status, language, etc.? • What roles do Characters of Color play (i.e. central, tangential, hierarchical)? In what ways does the story become raced, or not?	Guiding Questions: • How do dominant ideologies operate (white supremacy, patriarchy, cultural deficits, other forms of power)?	Guiding Questions: • How are the realities and/or experiences of People of Color represented, or not (cultural authenticity vs. generalizations, simplifications)?	Guiding Questions: • Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (historical, political, social, geographic, temporal, etc.), or not?	Guiding Questions: • How is focalization of the story constructed? • How does power operate within the narrative devices of the story (i.e. vantage point, story closure, assumptions)? Who has power? Who has agency? • How are dominant ideologies/deficit perspectives challenged? • How does resistance emerge?

Preliminary Observations

The analysis portion of this project is taking place, however preliminary observations indicate that of the 51 picture books published in 2021, the three most popular themes are about family relationships [n= 14], immigration [n=11] and learning about the community [n=9. Additional themes are stories about coming of age, friendship, adventures, self-love, gender expression, and biographies. Another observation we had during data collection was related to the importance of also analyzing book details such as the author, illustrator, the publishing press, and the book cover statements. A comprehensive analysis includes all parts of the book.

Resources

If you are interested in learning about efforts to diversify children’s literature, here is a list of organizations [not comprehensive] you can support:

- Reflection Press
- The Conscious Kid
- We Need Diverse Books
- Cooperative Children’s Book Center
- Multicultural Children’s Book Day #readyourworld

References

Bishop, R.S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix–xi.

Cooperative Children’s Book Center (2022). Children’s books by and about people of color published in the United States. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison Cooperative Children’s Book Center. <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-and-or-about-poc-2018/#USonly>

Pérez Huber, L., Camargo Gonzalez, L., & Solórzano, D. G. (2020). Theorizing a critical race content analysis for children’s literature about people of color. *Urban Education*, 0042085920963713.

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