

Race Equity Framing for Choosing Books in Early Childhood Education

A preliminary look at our book content analysis and a response to our findings.



In January 2019, ParentChild+ began developing a strategic plan for 2020-2025. As we started to envision what the next five years could look like, we knew we would not be able to do it without engaging and incorporating the perspectives of the people working in the field. After conducting a round of focus groups and engaging local site staff at our annual meeting, national center identified important areas that need improving and/or rethinking and the implementation of strategic plan seemed the most appropriate context in which to address them. One of these issues was the lack of racial diversity and representation in the books used throughout our network of sites. This report presents preliminary findings of our book content analysis which reviewed over 550 books, and provides our action steps in response to these findings.



Reflective Practice at ParentChild+



The first step in engaging program staff in this process was to conduct focus groups to examine their interpretations of our program and understand what was working and not working for them. Our research and evaluation department conducted twenty-four focus groups with over 200 site coordinators and early learning specialists in California, Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Focus group recordings were then summarized to identify recurring themes around program challenges, which were further explored during an all-attendee workshop held at our national conference. Based on our program staff's feedback, one issue was particularly clear - our books were not culturally representative. Our first step in addressing this issue was to conduct an exhaustive review of the books utilized across our program sites.



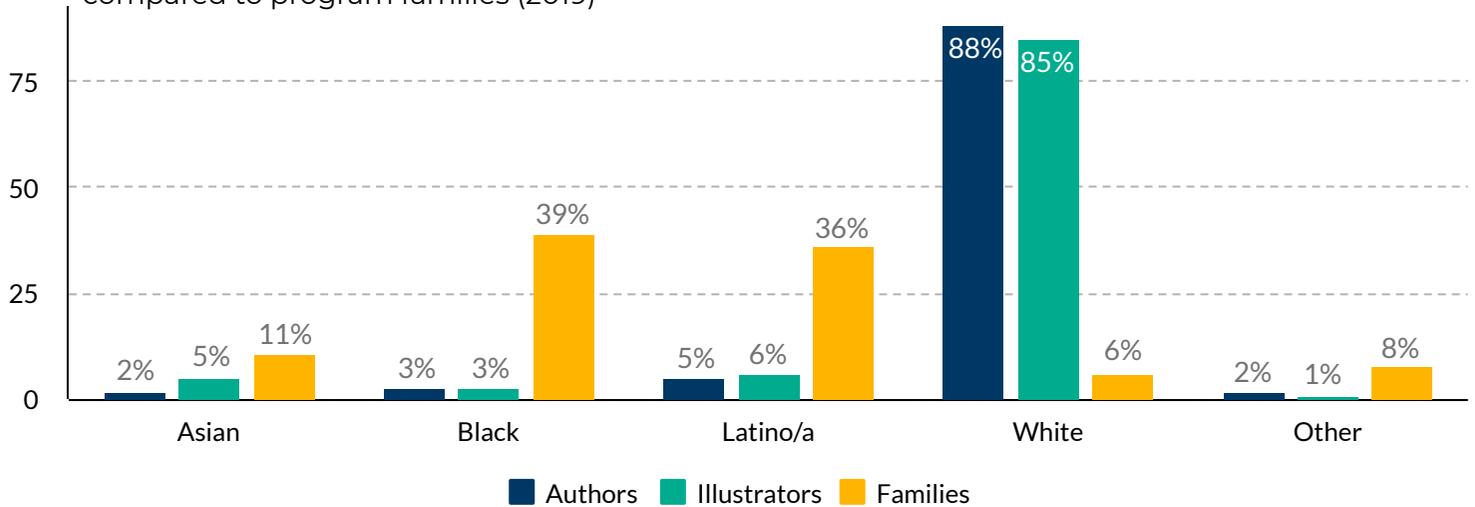
Book Content Analysis Project

First, we identified over 550 books with demographic data on their authors and illustrators that are used across our local partner sites. During this initial examination, we identified an emerging trend - **only 13% of authors and illustrators were people of color.** In comparison, in 2019, **94% of our families and 93% of our family child care providers were people of color.** This discrepancy required immediate attention and action, especially because racial equity is an issue that the National Center seeks to address intentionally through all facets of the Program. In general, racial representation in children's literature matters because it strengthens voices of people from different racial and cultural backgrounds and honors the lives of children of color. When children and families see characters that look and experience life like them, they are self-affirmed. Racial representation of authors and illustrators is equally important because it ensures that stories are being told and illustrated through a non-dominant perspective.

By prioritizing this going forward, we are demonstrating our commitment to cultural humility and strengths-based practices. A race equity orientation toward book selection is especially important because we know that children's uniquely rich and complex identities, experiences, families, cultures, and backgrounds shape their learning and development

Once completed, our book content analysis will explore various concepts including engagement components, parenting themes, routine themes, relationships among characters, racial and cultural representation, positive, and negative messaging, educational components, and much more. A full report of findings will be made available, as well as additional recommendations for program practice.

Racial representation of book authors and illustrators compared to program families (2019)



Action Steps

Now, you might be asking yourself, "What do we do with all this information?" Below are some steps we are taking as we assemble a new list of recommended books for our sites and that local sites can take as they select books for their families and community.

- 1 Look up the author and illustrator before purchasing the book**
 Each of the most frequently used books were written by White authors. It is essential to take a few minutes to Google search who the authors and illustrators are before buying books. You may be surprised to find that many books with characters of color represented are created by White authors and illustrators.
- 2 Consider books published after 2014**
 In 2018, the Cooperative Children's Book Center released a report that discussed the diversity gap in children's books. Although the number of children's books by or about people of color remains extremely low, there has been an increase since 2014.
- 3 Accept the reality of classic books**
 Classic books often hold sentimental value when they remind us of happy memories of our childhood. However, you do not do justice to books you love when you are not open to critiquing them. It is okay to love a book while also knowing it is not the best book choice for our program families and providers.
- 4 Explore diverse book list resources**
 Many organizations and bookstores dedicate their work to literature written by and about people of color. It is important to seek out these resources. Some resources are the African American Literature Book Club, American Indians in Children's Literature, and Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature winners.

We are issuing these guidelines to support a course correction and to advance racial equity, a cornerstone value of ParentChild+.



Book Recommendations

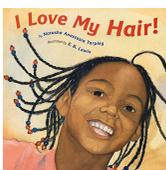
Below are eight books by and about people of color that we recommend. In addition to these books being culturally representative of our families and providers, they present healthy relationships within families, communities, and with oneself. They can also be used for identifying shapes, colors, and other early childhood educational components.



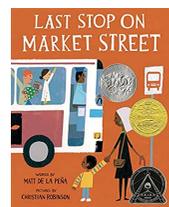
A Big Mooncake for Little Star
Author and
Illustrator: Grace Lin



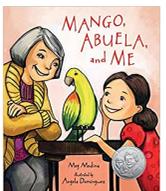
Every Little Thing
Author: Cedella Marley
Illustrator: Vanessa
Brantley-Newton



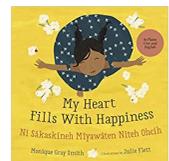
I Love My Hair!
Natasha Anastasia Tarpley
Illustrator: E.B. Lewis



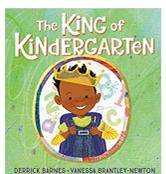
Last Stop on Market Street
Author: Matt de la Peña
Illustrator: Christian
Robinson



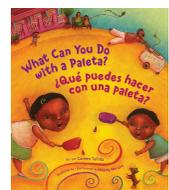
Mango, Abuela, and Me
Author: Meg Medina
Illustrator: Angela
Dominguez



My Heart Fills with Happiness
Author: Monique Gray
Smith
Illustrator: Julie Flett



The King of Kindergarten
Author: Derrick Barnes
Illustrator: Vanessa
Brantley-Newton



What Can You Do with a Paleta?
Author: Carmen Tafolla
Illustrator: Magaly
Morales

Acknowledgements: A special thank you to all our state directors, site coordinators, and early learning specialists who helped organize these conversations and provided meaningful feedback. Thank you to Tiffany Lee for refining this report to strengthen its message.



Analysis and Report by:
Cesar Zuniga, Research and Evaluation Director
You Zhou, Senior Research Scientist
Sarah Aparicio, Research and Data Analyst