

Questioning the Validity of a State Reading List

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Abstract

Quality incorporation of children's literature has long been supported to help students learn. The purpose of this study was to examine the 79 fiction selections of our state's sponsored reading list for grades K-2. The list was examined for original publication date, selections recognized as award winners, sex of authors, sex of protagonist, race of protagonists, and the presence of gender or racial bias. Results indicate the sponsored reading list is out of date, needs to contain more award winning selections, and fails to represent a balance of women authors and selections containing female protagonists. Gender bias was minimal and no presence of racial bias was observed.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Primary Students, Sponsored Curricula, Bias, Reading.

Introduction

In humankind's earliest days people shared stories by word of mouth with children to pass along knowledge and values and also for mere entertainment. In time, printed characters were used. Later, after the invention of the printing press books were printed and read as a way to communicate with children and capture their imaginations. Aside from the recent advances of technology and the impact of the Internet upon children learning to read (called the New Literacies), books are still a significant way we pass along the knowledge and values among generations. Educators know that books excite children and prompt them to imagine possibilities, ask questions, and enhance or teach literacy skills. The importance of quality children's books in today's classroom is critical for student learning and motivation to read. Selecting quality literature for the classroom is a challenging task. Resources that help facilitate this process should be reliable, updated and readily available to educators, librarians and parents. The purpose of this study was to read and evaluate the 79 fiction books on the suggested Indiana Reading List (IRL) for grades K-2 for teachers and parents.

The importance of children's books in the primary setting

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Good quality children's literature inspires, motivates and teaches. For this reason, most if not all, primary teachers read fiction books to explicitly teach and model the scientifically based reading elements of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Norton (2011) reports that teachers play a major role in developing a love for reading books in the lives of their students. Selecting quality literature for the primary classroom is essential to engage students. This is no easy task since there are 5000 new books published for young children in the United States each year (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2006).

Criteria for selecting children's books

Selecting from the many new publications is daunting since teachers must attempt to include representations from many cultures and peoples that view their cultures and themselves as equal members of society (Tunnel & Jacobs, 2008). Maintaining a balance of male and female protagonists in book selections is important to help students understand each other and learn about the perspectives, problems, and feeling of the opposite sex (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, & Short, 2011). Quality children's literature is also gender sensitive showing the multidimensional roles of men and women in our society (Temple et al., 2006).

Selecting books for primary age children is key to helping children foster an increased sense of self, to develop fundamental reading skills, and a love of reading. As a source for classroom selections, "teachers and librarians often rely on the professional judgment of committees that choose what they consider to be the most outstanding picture books published each year in this country and abroad" (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2005, p. 77). Reliable resources for book selections include award-winning titles that honor authors and illustrators whose work is judged by experts to be the best. According to Tunnell, Jacobs, Young, & Bryan (2012) there are over 200 different awards and prizes for children's books presented by a variety of organizations in the United States. There are credible awards bestowed by professional organizations. Two noteworthy examples include the International Reading Association's Award for new authors and the National Council of Teachers of English Excellence in Poetry for Children Award. However, for this study, the researchers focused on the five awards given by the American Library Association (ALA). For the purposes of this study, the authors chose the following five awards given to specific picture books that best fit the study. These awards are sponsored and administered by the Association for Library Service to Children, which is an arm of the ALA. These awards are appropriate for the study because: a) the ALA is a recognized leader in recommending quality children's literature among the variables used in the study; b) the awards are seen as prominent awards in their areas of focus; and c) the awards are based upon the quality of the book as defined by the awards' criteria.

- *Caldecott Medal*. An award given to a United States Illustrator for the most distinguished picture book for children published in the previous year (established 1938).
- *Coretta Scott King Award for writing*. An award given to an African American author for the outstanding inspirational and educational contribution to literature and children published in the previous year (established 1970).
- *Coretta Scott King Award for illustration*. An award given to an African American illustrator for the outstanding inspirational and educational contribution to literature and children published in the previous year (established 1974).
- *Mildred L. Batchelder Award*. An award given to a United States publisher for the most distinguished translated work for children published in the previous year (established 1968).

- *Pura Belpré Awards for writing and illustration.* An award given to a Latino/a writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino/a culture experience literature for youth published in the previous year (established 1996) (Lynch Brown, 2011).

Using children's literature in an evolving society.

As our culturally diverse, elementary classrooms armed with netbooks, Promethean Boards, and iPads instruct our children in a global world, authors of children's books are addressing audiences very differently from those even as few years ago (Lukens, Smith, & Coffel, 2013). As David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child* suggests, "children today experience time, space, social relationships-even reality itself-differently from the ways earlier generations did" (as cited in Lukens, et al., 2013, p.15). Eliza T. Dresang in her book, *Radical change: Books for youth in a digital age*, points out that more recent books respond to children in our digital age in three ways (as cited in Lukens, et al., 2013). First, she notes that more recent books provide children with connections to the world by linking them to an expanding community. Second, Dresang asserts that more recent books provide the reader more variability in subject matter and type of book. Finally, she claims that today's children have more access to subjects and styles of language than did previous generations of children. Examples of such books are genre blending, wordless picture books, and graphic and verse novels.

Lukens, et al. (2013) also addresses the changing boundaries of children's books. Topics are now addressed that were formerly off-limits for children's books. Picture books that include topics about homosexuality, divorce, illness, and disabilities are among the more recent books being published. Though there remains continuing dispute as to the suitability of these books for the elementary classroom, but many view their inclusion as important ways to academically connect to all learners.

Cultural diversity in children's literature.

According to Temple et al. (2006), quality children's books involve students emotionally. "Schools can be instrumental in providing opportunities for students to read and discuss from multiple viewpoints" (p. 90). They emphasize that selections of quality literature should include picture books of people from many different cultures so students will understand people who are different from them. They state that good books broaden children's understanding and empathy for other children around the globe. Children can identify with the story's character(s) and "walking in someone else's shoes is a way that often helps them develop a greater capacity to empathize with others" (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2011. p. 5). Norton (2007) agrees that children's literature plays a vital role in helping children understand their own heritage. She makes the following statement:

Carefully selected literature can illustrate the contributions and values of the many cultures. It is especially critical to foster an appreciation of the heritage of the racial minorities in American society. A positive self-concept is not possible unless we respect others as well as ourselves; literature can contribute considerably toward our understanding and thus our respect (p. 3).

Also, the lack of culturally diverse literature in the classroom may be a subtle form of racial bias. Lynch Brown et al., (2011) make the following point, "Even when schools and communities are culturally homogeneous, librarians and teachers should select books that reflect the diversity of the greater world" (p. 214). Literature can be a powerful tool for

combating mistrust or fear of people who are foreigners (Tunnel, Jacobs, Young, & Bryan, 2012).

Gender bias in children's books.

Another criterion when selecting high quality picture books for the primary classroom should be the absence of gender bias in the text and illustrations (Norton, 2011). According to Narahara (1998), teachers need to be critical when making selections to avoid books containing stereotypical gender roles. Narahara (1998) further states, "Gender role stereotypes affect how children perceive themselves, especially young children (p. 4). Studies show that females are likely to be portrayed as dependent human beings and submissive in nature, which is not an accurate representation of women today (Morgan, 2009). The selections should also possess protagonists equally representing both sexes in their storylines. A study by Davis and McDaniel (1999) that examined male and female appearances in Caldecott-winning books from 1972 to 1997 shows that males represented 61% of the protagonists while females accounted for only 39% (as cited in Morgan, 2009). In conclusion, as children learn about authors of picture books and their writing styles, primary teachers' selections should have a balance of books that have been written by both male and female authors so that children can recognize and visualize their own writing aspirations by the books' authors.

Indiana Reading List

The K-12 Indiana Reading List (IRL) arose out of the desire to help teachers and parents identify literature selections that align to the reading level and state standards in the content areas. The state's standards were first designed through stakeholder committees in the late 1990s and published in 2000. The IRL then followed and is divided into four grade level categories: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. It was last updated in 2008. The instructions accompanying the K-2 IRL state:

These lists provide lots of good choices for reading across all grade levels. There is something here for everyone, but they are not all inclusive. Many of the authors on the list have written other interesting works. Many titles are the first in a series that may spur readers into reading the other books about the same characters. Parents and families will want to preview every title for appropriateness of content, interest, and reading level before selecting it for reading for their children (Indiana Department of Education, 2008).

Additionally, when reviewing the K-2 IRL one also finds the statement:

Designed as a companion piece to Indiana's Academic Standards in English/Language Arts, the following selections of the IRL illustrate the quality and complexity of the suggested reading materials for students in Grades K – 2. The IRL is not required reading nor is it meant to be all-inclusive. Teachers and parents are encouraged to review the selections to ensure suitability for the individual student (Indiana Department of Education, 2008).

The disclaimers are noteworthy and transparent in that these selections need scrutiny by educators and that other selections might be useful to educate children. To this end, the researchers set out to explore the K-2 IRL selections for children's literature in an attempt to answer six research questions.

1. Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain current selections?
2. Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain a balance of authors from both sexes (male and female)?

3. Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain at least half its titles as ALA award winning selections?
4. Does the K-2 IRL of fictions books contain selections that have equal representation of male and female protagonist(s)?
5. Does the K-2 IRL of fictions books contain selections that have balanced representation in the racial composition of protagonist(s)?
6. Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain gender bias?
7. Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain racial bias?

Method

To address the research questions this study evaluated the 79 fiction books listed on the K-2 IRL. That meant that for this study fiction books were limited to the titled sections on the K-2 IRL of fiction books (50 titles) and folklore/fairy tales/mythology (15 titles), and poetry (14 titles). General fiction in this list is defined by the state as picture books, chapter books, illustrated books where the pictures do not tell the story and concept books that focus on shapes, colors and sizes. While the genre containing specific titles in the K-2 IRL may differ among researchers, we have adhered strictly to how they are categorized (and in essence coded) by the state's Department of Education and listed specifically in the K-2 IRL. Since the K-2 IRL is already published, the study assumes a sample of convenience. It is important to note that a purposeful sampling of the K-2 IRL would not be adequate for the study. The remaining K-2 IRL sections of nonfiction books (32 titles), biographical books (13 titles), magazines (11 titles), reference books (4 titles), and technical documents (4 titles) are outside the scope of this study.

Evaluation utilized six variables to reveal findings about the research questions. The variables included the 1) publication date, 2) sex of author, 3) selection as a Caldecott, Coretta Scott King writing, Coretta Scott King illustrating, Mildred Batchelder, or Pura Belpré award winning book, 4) protagonist's expressed or implied sex, 5) protagonist's race, and 6) presence of gender or racial bias.

The term sex is used as the appropriate term for research questions two and four to identify whether one is male or female. The term gender is used in research question six as the appropriate way to describe the perceived roles of men or women in social groups.

Seven books had no stated protagonist and focused on a concept or idea (e.g., Ten Black Dots). No frequency tally was recorded for such a book when this occurred. When a book had both a male and female protagonist then a frequency count was recorded for both sexes.

To begin the process the researchers randomly selected 15 books from the list on which to perform an item analysis to establish inter-rater agreement. Both researchers took notes on each of the fifteen books as to the protagonist's sex and race. If the researchers detected any gender or racial bias the page(s) was documented for further review. The researchers decided to record gender bias based on two distinct criteria from Russell's (2012) description. They include dominating roles for men and subservient roles for women and/or casting women as the weaker sex and the male as the physically stronger sex.

Racial bias was based on Russell's (2012) criteria of portraying characters as an ethnic or cultural group with similar habits or traits, with the same socioeconomic status and occupations, and not portraying a culture respectfully and accurately.

The researchers discussed their initial reviews and came to agreement on all 15 books. The same evaluation method was then performed on the remaining 64 books. One researcher recorded the publishing date and author's gender. The other researcher completed the review for award winning books. After all the books were reviewed, the researchers met, came to agreement if discrepancies existed, and created a final entry for tabulation.

Results

Following are the results for the analysis of the 79 books on the Indiana Reading List for primary grades that were classified as fiction. Research question 1 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain enough current selections?" Item analysis revealed an average publication date of 1971 and a median publication date of 1984. The earliest original publication date was 1843 and the most recent was 2002. Interestingly, the 2002 publication was the only selection originally published in this 21st century (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Item Analysis Results for the K-2 Indiana Reading List Fiction Sections*

Book Title	Year of 1st Publication	Author	Award	Sex of Protagonist(s)	Race	Gender or racial bias
The Adventures of Old Mr. Toad	1916	M	x	Male	x	x
Amelia Bedelia	1963	F	x	Female	White	Gender
Angela Weaves a Dream	1997	F	x	Female	Latina	x
Anno's Journey	1977	M	x	Male	White	x
Arthur	1995	M	x	Male	x	x
Baseball in the Barrio	1997	M	x	Male	Latino	x
A Bear Called Paddington	1958	M	x	Male	x	x
Brown Bear, Brown Bear...	1967	M	x	x	x	x
Butterfly Boy	1997	F	x	Male	Latino	x
Caps For Sale	1940	M	x	Male	White	x
The Cat in the Hat	1957	M	x	Male	White	x
Corduroy	1968	M	x	Male	x	x
Dinosaur Dream	1974	M	x	Male	x	x
The Doorbell Rang	1989	F	x	Male/ Female	White	x
Flossie and the Fox	1986	F	x	Female	Black	x
Frog & Toad ...	1970	M	Caldecott Honor	Male	x	x
The Gingerbread..	1998	M	x	Male	White	x
The Giving Tree	1964	M	x	Male	White	x
Goodnight Moon	1947	F	x	x	x	x
Green Eggs & Ham	1960	M	x	2 Males /Female	White	x

Harold & the Purple Crayon	1955	M	x	Male	White	x
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Table 1. (Continue) *Item Analysis Results for the K-2 Indiana Reading List Fiction Sections*

Book Title	Year of 1st Publication	Author	Award	Sex of Protagonist(s)	Race	Gender or racial bias
Hattie and the Fox	1987	F	x	Female	x	x
Henry and Mudge	2002	F	x	Male	White	Gender
If you Give a Mouse a Cookie	1985	F	x	Male	White	x
Just So Stories	1912	M	x	Male	White	x
Lily's Purple Plastic Purse	1996	M	x	Female	x	x
The Little Engine that Could	1930	M	x	Female	x	x
Lyle, Lyle Crocodile	1965	M	x	Male	White	x
Make Way for Ducklings	1941	M	Caldecott Medal	Female	White	x
Grandfather's Journey	1993	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	Asian	x
Millions of Cats	1928	F	x	Male	White	x
The Mitten	1989	F	x	Male	White	x
A Mother for Coco	1992	M	x	Male	x	x
The Mouse and the Motorcycle	1965	F	x	Male	x	x
Now One Foot, Now the Other	1981	M	x	Male	White	x
The Polar Express	1985	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	White	x
Rosie's Walk	1968	F	x	Female	x	x
The Snowy Day	1962	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	Black	x
Song of the Swallows	1949	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	Latino	x
Stone Soup	1986	F	x	Male	White	x
Sylvester and the Magic Pebble	1970	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	x	x
The Tale of Peter Rabbit	1902	F	x	Male	x	Gender
Tar Beach	1991	F	Coretta Scott King	Female	Black	x
Ten Back Dots	1968	M	x	x	x	x

There's an Alligator Under my Bed	1987	M	x	Male	x	x
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Table 1. (Continue) Item Analysis Results for the K-2 Indiana Reading List Fiction Sections

Book Title	Year of 1st Publication	Author	Award	Sex of Protagonist(s)	Race	Gender or racial bias
The Three Little Pigs	1997	M	x	Male	x	x
The Ugly Duckling	1843	M	x	Male	x	x
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	1969	M	x	x	x	x
Where the Wild Things Are	1963	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	White	x
Winnie the Pooh	1926	M	x	Male	x	x
The Golden Goose	1995	M	x	Male	White	x
Goldilocks and the Three Bears	1996	F	x	Female	White	x
John Henry	1987	M	x	Male	Black	x
La Cucaracha	1997	M	x	Female	x	x
Martina: The Caribbean folktale						
Little Red Riding Hood	1982	M	x	Female	White	x
Lon Po Po	1989	M	Caldecott Medal	Male	x	x
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters	1987	M	Caldecott Honor	Female	Black	x
Paul Bunyan	1984	M	x	Male	White	x
Pecos Bill	1992	M	x	Male	White	x
The Selkie Girl	1986	F	x	Female	White	x
Song to Demeter	1987	M F	x	Female	White	x
The Story of Johnny Appleseed	1971	M	x	Male	White	Gender
The Story of Jumping Mouse	1984	M	Caldecott Honor	Male	x	x
The Village of Round and Square Houses	1986	F	Caldecott Honor	Female	Black	x
Three Billy Goats Gruff	1973	M	x	Male	x	x
The Big Red	1989	F	x	x	x	x

Barn Chicken Soup with Rice	1962	M	x	Male	White	x
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Table 1. (Continue) *Item Analysis Results for the K-2 Indiana Reading List Fiction Sections*

Book Title	Year of 1st Publication	Autho r	Award	Sex of Protagonist(s)	Race	Gender or racial bias
Child's Garden of Verses	1885	M	x	Male/Female	White	x
The Dragons Are Singing Tonight	1993	M	x	x	x	x
Eats; Poems	1979	M	x	Male	x	x
Every Time I Climb a Tree	1925	M	x	Male/ Female	White	x
Flicker Flash	1999	F	x	Male/Female	White/ Black	x
I know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly	1990	M	Caldecott Honor	Female	White	x
James Marshall's Mother Goose	1986	M	x	Male/Female	White	x
Orchard Book of Nursery Rhymes	1990	F	x	Male/Female	White	x
Owl Moon	1987	F	Caldecott Medal	Male	White	x
Sheep in a Jeep	1988	F	x	x	x	x
The Wheels on the Bus	1990	M	x	Male/Female	White	x
You Read to Me, I'll Read to You	1962	M	x	Male	White	x
Mean	1971					
Median	1984					
Earliest	1843					
Most recent	2002					

Research question 2 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain a balance of authors from both sexes (male and female)?" The 79 books on the list included 80 different authors since one of the selections was coauthored. There were 55 books with male authors (68.8%). That was approximately twice the number of 25 (31.3%) books written by female authors (see Table 1).

Research question 3 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain at least half its titles as ALA award winning selections?" Analysis indicated 14 (17.8%) of the identified books on the list were selected as Caldecott Award winning titles and that one (1.2%) of the books was selected as a Coretta Scott King Award selection. There were no books on the list that had won either a Mildred Batchelder or Pura Belpré Award (see Table 1).

Research question 4 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain selections that have equal representation of male and female protagonists?" Table 2 identifies the percent sex of

protagonists in the books on the K-2 IRL. The number of books that contained a male protagonist was 56 (69.1%) and the number of books that contained a female protagonist was 25 (30.9%). The sex demographics for Indiana and the United States are also included for comparison (U.S. Census, 2010). Chi-square analysis yielded significant differences between the K-2 IRL percent sex of protagonists and Indiana populations ($X^2 = 15.8, df = 1, p < 0.0001$) and the United States ($X^2 = 15.8, df = 1, p < 0.0001$).

Table 2. *Percent Sex Expressed in Protagonists in the Indiana Reading List*

Sex	Frequency	Percent of protagonist(s)	Indiana demographics	United States demographics
Female	25	30.9	50.8*	50.8*
Male	56	69.1	49.2*	49.2*
Totals	81	100.0	100.0	100.0

*United States Census Bureau (2010)

Research question 5 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain selections that have a balanced representation in the racial composition of protagonists?" Table 3 identifies the percent composition of the racial identities of protagonists in the books on the K-2 IRL. The racial demographics of Indiana and the United States are also included for comparison (U.S. Census, 2010). Only the races found in the K-2 IRL analysis are included in Table 3 for Indiana and the United States. Since some books were of animals or abstract concepts only, not every K-2 IRL selection included a data point for this variable. The data revealed 38 (76%) of the selections were White, seven (14%) were Black, four (8%) were Latino/a and one (2%) was Asian. Remarkably, there were no selections that showed the American Indian race. Chi-square analysis yielded no significant differences between the K-2 IRL percent race of protagonists and Indiana populations ($X^2 = 13.6, df = 5, p = 0.299$) or the United States ($X^2 = 12.39, df = 6, p = 0.054$).

Table 3. *Percent Race Expressed in Protagonists in the Indiana Reading List*

Race	Frequency	Percent of protagonists	Indiana demographics*	United States demographics*
American Indian	0	0	0.3	0.9
Asian	1	2	1.6	4.8
Latino/a/Hispanic	4	8	6.0	16.3
Black	7	14	9.1	12.6
White/not Hispanic	38	76	81.5	63.7
Native Hawaiian	0	0	0	0.2
Two or more	0	0	2	2.9
Total	50	100	100.5	101.4

* United States Census Bureau (2010)- Census totals are not equal to 100%*

Research question 6 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain gender bias?" Only 4 (5.1%) of the 79 books contained gender bias (See Table 1). The observations for bias in all four books were illustrations perceived against women. Women were observed wearing aprons and completing household chores like cooking and cleaning.

Research question 7 asked, "Does the K-2 IRL of fiction books contain racial bias? There were no observations for racial bias.

Discussion

We found in the K-2 IRL that the selection of literature ranged from 1843 to 2002 for year of first publication. Some of the book jackets and illustrations were quite old and not as attractive as newer selections. Many of the older books were small and not suitable to read to a large group of children. New forms of children's picture books including the writing and illustrations were not included in the K-2 IRL selections even though some of these books had been published with awards since 1991. There was only one book on the list published since 2000. And, only 18 of the 79 fiction books were published in the 1990s. The researchers understand that a book's worth cannot be determined by the year in which it was published; however, with the changing landscape of children's books and new printing technologies that create more sophisticated illustrations and fonts, it would seem that there would be more current selections. Most of the books on the list were dated and may not be relevant or engaging for today's primary students. *Therefore, we answered research question one by stating the K-2 IRL did not contain enough current selections.*

There were twice as many male authors as females. The researchers felt that a balance of book authors in the classroom is more beneficial to best promote equal perspectives from both male and female writers. Before reading a picture book, teachers often identify the author and illustrator and may even give a brief biography before or after reading the book. Sometimes students write letters to the author, see an author in person or Skype with them online to discuss ideas for characters or the writing style of the book. If there is not a balance of male and female authors, young girls may feel that authoring a book is mainly a man's job and a teacher may not be aware of the developing stereotype. *Therefore, we answered research question two by stating the K-2 IRL of fiction books did not contain a balance of authors from both sexes (male and female).*

Only 19% of the books selected for this list were award-winning books using our selected criteria, which the researchers felt was far too few. Since librarians and teachers looked to the experts for books to use in their classroom, it seemed that this list should contain a robust number of the selected children's book awards. The award winning book selections are published online and are easy to access. *Therefore, we answered research question three by stating the K-2 IRL of fiction did not contain at least half its titles as ALA award winning selections?*

Nearly 70% of the books contained a male protagonist, a finding that perpetuates a male dominant world. Both boys and girls need to "see themselves as human beings with an equal right to all benefits and choices" (Narahara, 1998, p. 13). According to Russell (2012), stereotypes and gender bias still plague our society. The findings supported those of the Sociologists for Women in Society (2011) that found similar results for about 6000 leading children's books that were published in the 20th century. *Therefore, we answered research question four by stating the K-2 IRL of fiction books did not contain selections that have equal representation of male and female protagonists.*

Of the seven demographic categories reported in the U.S. Census, four were represented in the K-2 IRL. The 79 picture books included protagonists from the following races: White/not Hispanic, Black, Latino/a/Hispanic and Asian. Three race categories, American Indian, two or more races, and Hawaiian, were not represented. As a global society changes the makeup of cultures and races for Indiana and the United States, it is essential for schools to include books about children from many races. Lukens et al. (2013) recommended that teachers include in their classroom libraries books about children who are different from the white middle-class and also incorporate a wide variety of books that represent lifestyle and cultural beliefs of as

many children as possible. The value of such literature for children include understanding, respect and tolerance for different cultural groups, understanding of universal rights and fundamental freedoms, and preparation for our children to live and prosper in a diverse society (Norton, 2011). One goal in promoting diversity is to get students to look beyond their own local communities for learning. Children need books that represent our entire world to develop positive attitudes and respect for all individuals. The data from Table 3 indicates that the percent race of protagonists is balanced. The researchers identified the racial composition of only protagonists so that data was recorded consistently. At times this was challenging. An example is *Winnie the Pooh*. The researchers did not record a race for the protagonist, Pooh, since he is not human. But, Christopher Robin is a supporting character and is White. Future studies could investigate the race for supporting characters and how they contribute to the representation and perception of racial identities. An increase in the total number of White characters may lead to an increased perception of "Whiteness" among the selections. But, when considering the protagonists statistical analysis indicates a balanced selection. *Therefore, we answered research question five by stating the K-2 IRL of fiction books did contain selections that had balanced representation in the racial composition of protagonists.*

The gender bias was a small percentage, but still concerning. In the four books on the list, women were consistently performing household chores and seen only wearing dresses. For example, *Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish was constantly illustrated wearing an apron over her dress and a bonnet. However, because *Amelia Bedelia* was published in 1963 when women in the United States were not seen wearing pants in picture books, this would make sense. So, in at least two of the books the gender bias was because of the age of the selection, not depicting women only as "domestic engineers." However, books like *Amelia Bedelia* can help teachers and parents address gender issues by creating a teachable moment. Gender awareness or fair treatment of the sexes can be discussed while the book is read. Teachers and parents can overtly address the inaccurate and unfair stereotypes to both boys and girls. We need to teach children that some attitudes and viewpoints often found in earlier books are no longer acceptable (Russell, 2012). *Therefore, we answered research question six by stating the K-2 IRL of fiction books did not contain gender bias.*

As there were no observations for racial bias, one can reasonably infer that this specific section of the IRL contains selections where characters were portrayed appropriately and respectfully. *Therefore, we answered research question 7 by asserting that the K-2 IRL of fiction books did not contain racial bias.*

Conclusions and Limitations

The overall conclusion is that the K-2 IRL fiction books are out of date and do not contain enough quality selections. Nor does the list contain a balance of selected texts written by female authors. Furthermore, more selections with female protagonist are needed to balance the list. It was also encouraging to see that the list contained minimal gender bias and no racial bias.

While the study provides a window into the K-2 IRL there are some limitations that need to be recognized. Some titles on the list were published before the dates that the awards chosen for this study were instituted. Therefore, many of the titles were not candidates for the awards. Other awards for excellence might yield different conclusions. Additionally, some may view timeliness differently based on their focus and beliefs about technology, relevancy of the "classics", and the importance of visual literacy in children's books. As described earlier, supporting characters contribute to over presence of race and gender and should also be considered in interpreting these results. Also, when analyzing books for bias there is a degree

of interpretation that exists between readers. One reader may not view bias in dialogue, dress, or role of a character, but another may.

Recommendations

This study provides a model that others may use when asking the question, "How well does their sponsored list represent quality selections?" The K-2 IRL review, or similarly conducted reviews of sponsored reading lists, are useful for classroom teachers, curriculum developers, and other professionals as they adopt new quality children's literature to help teach their national or state standards. Similar reviews can be used to assess the suitability of sponsored lists to address the learning and application of developing literacy skills in nonprint forms such as media and digital literacies. Though adoptions may come from a sponsored list, quality may not be ensured. We encourage professionals to review and share their results with educators and community leaders as they work at creating a reading environment that is rich and academically rewarding for all students. They may wish to include different award-winning titles that better represent their aspirations and literacy standards. The researchers assert that a well-developed and continually updated list can help guide parents and educators to appropriate grade-level literature that is current, culturally diverse, and gender balanced. Ultimately, incorporating children's literature with primary students that is relevant and engaging will help them become successful not only in school, but also in our global society.

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